



Isekai no Mahou ha Okureteru !

Synopsis:

Felmenia Stingray was a genius magician. She quickly became the most distinguished magician of the Astel Kingdom after her discovery of white fire magic, which had the power to burn anything.

However, the world is in peril due to the Demon King. The kingdom's court magicians perform a summoning ritual for heroes and bring forth a hero and two youths, a boy and a girl. Unlike the girl, the young man refused to fight the Demon King alongside the Hero and demanded to be sent back to his world. The kingdom, angry with his behavior, lock him away.

Now Felmenia stands before the young man with her strongest magic, the white flame, being completely useless and asks who he is. It was already obvious to her that this man was far stronger than she was. To this he simply responds.

"Yakagi Suimei, a magician."

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Chapter 01: Yakagi Suimei, a Magician

—Felmenia Stingray was one of the court mages of the Astel Kingdom.

As the second daughter of Count Stringray, she was a young lady of noble birth and raised without any inconveniences. She was a genius that had looked into the depths of magic by studying under an old mage, who was called the Sage, from a small age on after her extraordinary magical potential was discovered.

It had been ten years since she started learning the mysticism from the old mage. After learning the basics of magic from him, she was quickly initiated into all the secrets, which are said to take at least thirty years.

So she was told: There is no more I can teach you. Follow through with your own wits and magic.

Her life then became more hectic compared to the time she spent studying under the old mage. There was magic research of course, but also the appointment as the youngest court mage, a lot of jobs entrusted to her and an unthought-of number of party invitations. New experiences like numerous unfamiliar jobs, tea parties with noble ladies, typical noble dances and escapes from magical dungeons kept occurring in succession.

This lifestyle without even sparing time for sleep, was harsh and painful, but so fulfilling that she could forget all the hardships. So much that she already felt a sense of accomplishment. Right now, she was living her life. Not in the birdcage of a noble lady, but as working gear of this kingdom.

A few years after she left the old mage's apprenticeship, Felmenia made a great discovery. In the middle of a job to subjugate high ranking monsters and devils as a court mage, she discovered the principle of flames, which no one acquired before.

Yes, Felmenia finally attained the truth at the tender age of eighteen. The truth about the flame. She found the white flame that burns all things in existence.

Felmenia reported this to her teacher and his Majesty the King without allowing herself to rejoice. Her teacher showered her with unprecedented praise and astonishment and even the King granted her words of praise for her great achievement.

At this moment, she found meaning in her life. Her continued efforts in searching for herself truly paid off. And it solidified her resolve to continue on the path of magic.

After that, Felmenia achieved numerous meritorious deeds in the kingdom while she pressed on with magic. From the subjugation of the devils in the north through to the extermination of the giant monster in the desert downwards to the reform of the magic studies in the Kingdom and the establishment of an academy to advance it.

Her achievements earned her praises from all sides. The gratitude of the people, the jealousy of her colleagues and the expectations from her parents were the greatest honour for her.

And by now, Felmenia was recognized as one of the best mages in the

Kingdom.

However, she couldn't lift a single finger in front of the boy standing right before her eyes despite holding the valid title of the strongest mage in the Kingdom.

A full moon hung in the star-covered dark sky. Underneath, in the courtyard of the Camelia Castle, the seat of King Astel, the boy in front of her opened his mouth really stumped.

"...Oh boy. I can't endorse tailing someone and snooping around. Only a pitiful and foolish stray sheep that doesn't know the world yet, is allowed to do that."

This boy, speaking in unfamiliar terms, was one of the two people, who were summoned together with the Hero Reiji. Unlike the girl, who had agreed to defeat the Devil King together with the Hero, the extremely ordinary boy had denied the King's request in front of the assembled company and demanded to be send back to his own world.

Like you can see— I'm an ordinary guy. I've no special power, so I can't fight any monster or devils, much less the Devil King. I can't fight. Don't drag me into it. Send me back.

After saying that, he was confined in a given room. That happened a few days ago.

The girl had mustered her courage even while appearing to suffocate from the fear and confusion after the sudden summoning, and loudly

announced to accompany the Hero. On the other hand, the boy was backbit by the cabinet ministers, generals and castle guards as disgraceful, ignoble, egoistic and scum after he stubbornly insisted to be send back.

Yet, this current situation.

The white flame, her utmost pride up till now, was erased by the boy with a casual wink of his hand. And right now, he stood in front of her while emitting a serene magical power and a chilly daunting aura.

"—Okay, can I go next, Miss Mage?"

At this moment, Felmenia Stingray realized how foolish she had been.

...The boy was most likely strong and clever. His appearance was a farce. The ones, who took this pitiful bystander for a fool, were actually fools themselves. He was that cunning. And his strength was dizzying high to put into words.

This boy was a monster, who had reached an even higher level on magic than her teacher, with numerous secret skills she could never hope to match and had an absurd knowledge that would allow him to kill the Hero, who was granted a tremendous power from the divine protection of the heroic summoning, with a snap of his finger.

He was a genuine mage without doubt.

"...Who are you?"

She asked with a trembling voice, whereupon the boy fiddled bored-looking with something on top of his hand—

“—Yakagi Suimei, a magician.”

and named himself for the first time.

Chapter 02: Suddenly in a Different World

"Oww..."

Suimei leaked an anguished voice from the pain on his bottom, which was the price for the sudden event to which he couldn't even react.

It came out of nowhere. Sure, he had forecast that something was going to happen, but it was too sudden to ready himself.

The floor was hard. Probably stone paving or tiles. Falling flat on his backside, his tailbone was in anguish. That happened a moment ago.

So, how did it come this? He didn't even need to recall it, since it only happened a few seconds ago.

On his way back from school with his two friends, he was pulled into a teleport magic circle that had suddenly appeared on the road.

And at the teleported destination, he had hit his bottom.

(...Man, what a blunder.)

Suimei had explored secret magic in the modern era with its concrete jungles. He had only started magic around twelve years ago, but was confident in his skills. Yet, he, a modern magician, easily fell for the magic from someone else.

He had sensed it, even seen it, yet he couldn't react and simply watched.

If that wasn't a blunder, then what? He felt ashamed and disappointed.

With still teary eyes from the pain on his bottom and the humiliation, Suimei suddenly faced sideways, worried about his friends who had walked besides him—

"Ow..."

Right next to him, his friend Shana Reiji struggled with the same pain on his bottom like Suimei, who was rubbing his bottom.

"Hey, Reiji, you okay?"

"Yeah, somehow. You?"

"My ass hurts. Like seriously. It split in half..."

"Hahaha, you too, huh— Wait, it's just you here, Suimei?"

Reiji laughed merrily on his silly joke, but only for a moment. He then noticed the absence of their other friend Anou Mizuki, who had walked with them, and called out uneasy.

She certainly wasn't here. The girl, who had walked next to them just a moment ago, was nowhere to be found.

He looked around briefly. The round room was enclosed by stone walls and except the old candle stand, which gave a dim illumination, there

was nothing. No, there was something: A solid door and a pattern on the hard floor they sat on, the teleport magic circle.

"Y-Yeah, Mizuki isn't here..."

Suimei muttered still somewhat perplexed in anxiety over his missing friend. Meanwhile Reiji racked his brains with an even more bewildered expression.

"Why... And where are we...?"

"I don't know either. But I do know that we were brought to this unknown place by someone's will."

"...You mean that?"

Reiji looked dubious at the big magic circle on the floor. Suimei followed his suit and looked at it again too. Within one big circle were drawn four more circles and the geometric patterns in it didn't match the western four or five elements, nor the Chinese five elements. And words he had never seen before on a magic circle were put in place there.

He could tell that the circle was similar to the summoning or séance ones that he developed himself, but that knowledge only applied to him. Reiji, an ordinary guy, obviously didn't know anything about it. Suimei knew him since middle school, but never told him that he was a magician. Therefore Reiji could only know about the thing at his feet from subcultures like manga or anime.

And suspicion arose in Reiji from that. He only had a vague guess that maybe this thing was the reason for their current situation.

"Most likely."

"Uwah..."

On Suimei's clear affirmation to the assessment of their situation, Reiji suddenly made an exhausted look. It certainly was the right situation for such a face. Even Suimei himself had a touch of bitterness on his stumped face right now.

"...Hey, Suimei. Somehow, this out the blue development seems really familiar to me."

"I bet. The novel from Mizuki the other day had the same stuff."

"I know, right? It really resembles the plot, where the MC suddenly gets called to another world and is told to defeat the Devil King."

"Not funny. I can't laugh at this joke."

With a face like from a stomach-ache, Suimei answered in an annoyed tone. Upon that, Reiji had an expression of mixed feelings and laughed dryly.

"Ha, Haha... But it really feels like that."

"Are you being serious, Reiji?"

"Yeah."

Suimei averted his gaze from the nodding Reiji for now and secretly scanned the surroundings with magic. Ending up in the same development from a novel was too bizarre, so he didn't accept it, but if this wasn't Earth, then there should be difference in the environment.

Little by little, he collected information. The gravity was average and the atmosphere had a similar composition as well. It were acceptable values due to regional variation.

Still—

(The Mana's rich here... Is it the room's fault?)

Indeed, the source for mystic powers in the air called Mana was very rich here. So rich that it was on par with places like above a spirit vein, a sacred temple or circle and the Navel of the Earth.

However, deciding that this was a different world only based on that would be jumping to conclusions and totally unreasonable. It was possible that they simply chose a place with a rich Mana density to activate the magic circle. Actually, that was the most plausible explanation.

To begin with, Reiji had no means to probe the Mana and wasn't able to feel a change in it. His hunch must come from something else.

"Reiji, what makes you think that?"

"I just got this really strong hunch."

"Oh boy, did your brain melt, my dear Reiji?"

"No, not like I was hit by any weird electro-magnetic waves. Just look—"

A loud crash followed Reiji's words. He had lightly hit the floor outside the magic circle, whereupon the stone floor was smashed to dust.

"Impossible..."

Suimei widened his eyes from seeing that. Even if Reiji was a handsome super athlete, this was going too far. It was impossible. A high force was needed to smash up stones. A mere knock could never achieve that. Maybe if he used his overwhelming good looks, but no, that was going in a different direction.

"See what I can do."

"Don't give me that. Stop feeding me strange ideas..."

Damn. A summon magic that permanently strengthen your physique sure is awesome... His thoughts wandered into that direction, but then he suddenly realized that his mind worked like that and analyzed the merits and demerits of magic because he himself was a magician. There were other things to consider first, yet he lacked the tension for it.

"So, what about you, Suimei?"

"...Nope."

Reiji asked him hinting, but he could only reply like that. Even when he squeezed his fist or transferred Mana, it didn't feel like he was strengthened at all. Most likely, only Reiji was chosen for the position of the sacred Hero that defeats the evil Devil King. If so, then Suimei was totally out of place here.

He dropped his shoulders, obviously flabbergasted, whereupon the magic circle to his feet suddenly started to glitter. Reiji's expression became filled with unrest.

"This is..."

"It's activating...! Are we transferred again or..."

"Teleported!?"

Reiji was quick on the uptake. Suimei put himself on guard while listening to his accurate answer. Then a magic circle of one size smaller appeared in midair.

"Here it comes!"

"—!"

As soon as a silhouette appeared from the magic circle, Reiji made his move. Maybe he identified what had appeared? His movements were agiler than before. An effect from his strengthened physique.

Thus Reiji caught Anou Mizuki as soon as he spotted her appearing in

midair.

"Mizuki!"

"Fueh? Reiji-kun, how...?"

"Good for you, Mizuki. Reiji literally saved your ass."

And like this, the three of them were reunited in an unknown place.

Chapter 03: An Absurd Request like Expected

"No way. Are you serious..."

"Yeah. The possibility exists."

After Reiji caught Mizuki, she was filled in about the current situation. At first she was rather confused too, but not being alone here surely worked in favour. With the encouragement of her two friends, she accepted it before long. Still, one had to praise her for having nerves of steel as she didn't run away from reality.

"Okay, I get it."

"You sure are quick on the uptake."

"You two are quite calm too. It would be embarrassing to fall in a panic by myself. Besides, now that we're here, we can only take things as they come."

Mizuki adopted a clear-cut attitude. She had long, black hair and a gentle look with an appearance that made her look like some frail, secluded young lady. Furthermore, she possessed a gentle, yet surprisingly strong and unperturbed heart. Reiji smiled at her.

"You're strong, Mizuki."

"O-Okay."

She ended up turning bright red from his smile. That was nothing new, but neither was Reiji's unconscious enticer skill.

A totally inappropriate steamy mood filled the room and Suimei asked Mizuki as if to splash water on it.

"So, Mizuki, there's something I want to ask."

"Eh? Sure."

"If this is like the novel, then next comes..."

"Y-Yeah, some important people of the different world show up. Otherwise..."

The first part was like expected the same from the novel, but she added an otherwise, so there must be a different development possible too.

Reiji asked about that after a short pause.

"Is there something else?"

"In some other novel, the destination, in other words this place, happened to be the castle of the Devil King."

"...Uwah. Now that's harsh."

Yes, in most novels, the summoned MC would only face off against the

Devil King at the end of the story after many twists and turns. However. When this was an unexpected plot like Mizuki had mentioned, then this would be the focal point of the climax, the last battle.

That wasn't all too funny. Only a peril for their lives. Such a distress was really redundant.

Then Reiji asked Mizuki with a calm tone.

"If I remember correctly, that novel was the type, where the MC defeated the Devil King at once and triumphantly returned to the county of the different world as a hero, right?"

"Yeah. Then another strong foe appeared and later the MC was dragged into a civil war.."

Mizuki started to explain, when Suimei, enhancing his hearing with magic, heard some noise from outside the room.

"Listen, you two."

"Mh?"

"I know already. Mizuki, someone is coming and a lot of them at that."

Apparently Reiji had heard them too. His own enhancement wasn't for show. Right after giving a simple explanation to her, he shifted his gaze towards the origin of the noise, the passage behind the door, and stood protecting in front of Mizuki.

She cowered anxiously. And Suimei took a stance like Reiji as well.

"Now let's see what shows up..."

"I just hope it will be these important people that summoned us."

"Don't be stupid. If anything, hope for our classmates saying 'fooled ya'."

"..."

Reiji didn't respond to Suimei's little joke. Whether that was because the footsteps drew closer to the door or he simply believed it was actually better when some important people from the different world showed up, was not apparent. Anyway— Who exactly was it that came over and was about to enter the room?

Suimei glanced to the side, where Reiji stood all tensed up, ready to leap forward at any moment, and Mizuki backed off as to not be a hindrance to him.

As for Suimei, instead of growing stiff in an unfamiliar situation, he was excited with his heart was racing over this unpredictable situation. His heart as a magician of course.

Then he quietly checked his belongings. He got here without any preparations, so he carried nothing but mundane things on him. It were —

(I got my altered bag and the stuff inside. A chain accessory, a vial with mercury, a card, a jacket, the discrepancy gloves and a bit of the eight key

nostrum... To be honest, that's all not very useful. But—)

If something happened, he had to act. They all had lived in Japan, so Suimei was most likely the only one with combat experience, as he belonged to the underworld. He would like to keep the fact that he was a magician hidden, but not in the exchange for his friends' lives. In the worst case, he could just erase their memories, if even he felt sorry about it.

The three of them tensed up from their respective worries. Then the footsteps finally stopped in front of the door.

A short pause that felt like an eternity and cramped their stomachs ensued. Before long, the door was opened with a noise of something heavy being dragged along.

"—!"

"Firmus—"

(My Perdurability—)

While Reiji was distracted, Suimei readied a defence magic. It couldn't be ruled out that they would attack right away. And there was no harm in being prepared.

—And then, a group clad in armour appeared in the entry. They looked like armed humans. A first relief that they weren't monster, devils or demons.

The soldiers warily approached them in an orderly formation.

What will happen? Suimei still kept his magic ready, but the group split up, making way for a little girl with long, blue hair, wearing an elegant white dress, and a woman, wearing a robe as white as a polished pearl.

And then—

“Eh...?”

“Mh—?”

Both females made a bewildered expression as if they met an unexpected development. They huddled together and whispered in secret.

“White Flame, oughtn’t there be one summoned Hero?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“But I see three people here...”

“My guess would be that two of them were swallowed up in the heroic summoning.”

“Oho...”

They were whispering, but with his enhanced ears, Suimei could hear

them and while he did understand their language, he was surprised. It was a strangely rhyming language that wasn't Japanese, nor any other language from earth. Although he didn't know the language, he understood it.

A possible explanation for that was that a language spell was cast on him during the summoning. How convenient.

Hearing the words hero and summoned, Suimei decided it wasn't necessary anymore to be alerted and secretly cancelled his magic. Reiji too relaxed his posture.

Then Suimei leaned close to them and asked Mizuki.

"...They seem surprised... Say, Mizuki, know of any plot like this?"

"Yeah. There are stories, where the friends of the summoned hero get dragged along, but..."

Suddenly Mizuki stopped talking and tilted her head to the side. What was up with this hesitation?

"...?"

"Mizuki, something bothering you?"

"Uhm, in said plot, the friend of the summoned hero, in our case either Suimei-kun or me, will make a contract with an evil god and turn against the hero."

"What the? Why an evil god of all things?"

"I'm not sure either.."

Mizuki was flurried in anxiety. To be honest, even Suimei felt like loosing his cool. Contracting an evil god, what kind of bullshit was that?

He could only imagine a tragic fate, where the summoning killed thousands of people and even if you survived it, a dangerous evil avatar that uses up all of your life's luck, awaited you and forced you to pay a compensation.

Suimei felt a cold sweat running down his back, whereas Reiji asked Mizuki.

"Turns against the hero... Why suddenly fight me?"

"Because either Suimei-kun or I will come to hate you in this plot, make a contract and fight the hero."

"Eh...?"

Reiji turned remarkably pale on her words and was befuddled, so Mizuki quickly denied it.

"...O-Of course I'll never hate you, Reiji-kun. I-I-If anything, I I-I- lo-love..."

As she was embarrassed to say it to his face, her words gradually became quieter and the end couldn't be heard anymore, but Reiji's face colour took a turn for the better and he awkwardly faced Suimei.

"A-And you, Suimei?"

"Nah. I wouldn't have stayed with you for six years if I hated you. Just think about it."

"G-Good..."

Hearing their answers, Reiji made a sigh of relief now. To be honest, there was no way Suimei could come to hate such a nice guy.

While the three had such an exchange, the girl with the long, blue hair called out to them.

"Excuse me for interrupting your conversation, but do you have a moment?"

"Ah, yes."

When Reiji give his okay, the blue-haired girl elegantly corrected her posture and dropped a curtsy, then she spoke.

"Forgive me for bringing you here so suddenly. I am the second child of Almadias Root Astel, the King of Astel Kingdom: Titania Root Astel. And this is the person that made efforts to summon you here..."

When Princess Titania turned a bit to the side to introduce and beckon her, the person in question, the woman in the white robe stepped forward.

"My name is Felmenia Stingray, a court mage. Nice to make your acquaintance."

The woman was called White Flame by the Princess earlier. She had named herself a mage and her body was indeed surrounded fluently by mana. She seemed to be a long practiser of magic.

After their introductions, Reiji stepped forward now and started to name himself politely.

"Thank you for your polite introduction. My name is Shana Reiji. If you are more familiar with family names last, then please call me Reiji Shana. These two are my friends. Mizuki Anou to my right and Suimei Yakagi to my left."

Reiji introduced them like that, whereupon the guards made a ruckus and the princess Titania, as well as the mage Felmenia made an impressed expression. Reiji's dignified behaviour and well-mannered greeting must have been impressed them.

Next up, Mizuki came to the front and introduced herself to them.

"Nice to meet you. My name is Mizuki Anou..."

And lastly, Suimei too stepped forward, imitating Mizuki.

"I'm...Suimei Yakagi."

His introduction ended by simply stating his name. He had nothing more to say, nor was this any situation to run his mouth carelessly.

Then Titania let her gaze wander over these three and closed her eyes like thinking about something.

"Reiji-sama, Mizuki-sama, Suimei-sama it is then. The reason we called you here is because we have to ask a favour from... one of you at all costs."

"And that is?"

"Yes, at present the leader of the devils, Devil King Nakshatra threatens the peace of our world and I would like you to exterminate him."

...At the very moment Princess Titania uttered this, Suimei, Reiji and Mizuki had all the same reaction in their hearts: That figures!

Only Suimei additionally placed his hand on his chin and looked up at the ceiling.

Chapter 4: Absolute Denial in the Audience Room

Upon their arrival to a different world via summoning, the princess appeared with a request to save the world. In this unnatural, restrained atmosphere, this development had apparently been delayed. It could not help but have a resigned confusion.

While they were shocked over understanding what she had just asked, Titania too, had asked, as if she was a little confused.

Titania: "I'm sorry since this is so abrupt, but which one of you is the hero?"

Reiji: "Um..."

Mizuki: "That is..."

At this question, Reiji and Mizuki exchanged glances with troubled faces. It couldn't be that one of them was the hero. They were originally just normal people. If they asked "What do you mean by hero?", then it would inevitably be the equivalent of "I'm definitely not the hero." Thus, there would be no meaning to asking that question, but their lack of understanding of what had been asked was still a problem.

Suimei, on the other hand, planned to obtain information from the one who had summoned them here, and asked, "May I (speak)?"

Titania: "Yes, please go ahead."

Suimei: "You guys summoned us to get a hero – aren't there any signs that identify one as a hero?"

Titania: "Signs of a hero...was it?"

Suimei: "Yes."

Following that, Titania glanced at the quiet Felmenia, who nodded and turned towards the three.

Felmenia: "There is such a thing. The hero that was summoned by the ceremony, that calls forth great men, upon crossing over to this world, is given divine protection by the elements, and this mighty power is kept

within his body. Are any of you in a similar situation?"

"If that's the case, then I think it's me. After I came here, I've felt unbelievable power bursting forth from within me," Reiji answered. The surrounding soldiers began to murmur amongst themselves. Yes, right here, the power had manifested in him. However, both Mizuki and Suimei were the same in that no power had revealed itself.

Be that as it may...

"From the elements, huh," Suimei muttered to himself, suspicious of their true motives. The elements were also present in their own world, and there were four or five main ones: earth, water, fire, and wind. *Besides those, magic, which plays an important part, may also be considered one.*

But, given Felmenia's tone just then, it was as if it was certain that there would be a person like that. The foundation of the belief in ghosts is magic. Even if the spirit magic was part of the foundation, it was still a little strange. Or, possibly, if magic here is as she had said –

Titania: "You're the hero, right?"

Reiji: "Uh... Yes."

While Suimei was thinking, Titania, as if enraptured, had been staring at Reiji. As Reiji was the hero, she might have developed some sort of longing for him. Furthermore, besides his (handsome) face, there was a certain gracefulness. Reiji, who was facing her, was a little puzzled.

And then, Titania abruptly took Reiji's hand.

Titania: "Hero, please, somehow, please, please help."

Reiji: "Eeeeeh!?"

Felmenia: "Pri-princess..."

The abrupt event had caused even the robed Felmenia to be astonished. In an impatient voice, she called out to Titania.

Titania: "Ahh..Sorry, Hero...What I had just done was rude... After this, I think my father will explain to you in the audience room, so please answer then."

Reiji: "Un..understood."

Titania: "Well then, this way please. I will lead the way."

At Titania's words, the soldiers once again orderly lined up, opening a path for Suimei and his friends.



While following the soldiers, they gradually became used to the passage as they walked. As Titania had said, the audience room was fairly close, somewhere inside the castle.

When they followed, from the gloomy stone passage that was illuminated by candles, they exited into a bright marble passage.

On the paths they had taken thus so far, there hadn't been such exquisite, pretty ornaments. Here and there, there were arrangements of pieces of art, drawings of never before seen creatures, and saw new kinds of armor. This really was a new world, a sword and magic fantasy world. Well, that was the impression the objects in the immediate vicinity had given. On the other side, there was a person who said, well, even the things that were here were not very varied.

The soldiers walked with an admirable gait, as if to protect them. Their scrupulous attention to their training was evident; there wasn't even a murmur amongst them.

Next to the princess was someone who seemed to be a so-called palace guard. The guard's rugged look evoked the same feeling as that of a rock.

And, for the sake of making a good impression on Reiji, Titania walked next to and continually spoke to him. She began with asking what kind of place it was that he came from, to asking about his age, and then to the likes of asking what he was good at.

However, Mizuki also walked next to him, and she was probably agitated. Although she was not Reiji's lover, she was the one closest to being considered his lover. She was currently, certainly, aiming for that position.

If a beautiful girl of a high social position stuck to him, how do you think she would feel?

Even though her stoic facial expression did not show much, there was a certain sullenness in her that could be seen.

And there was another person: Imperial Court Mage Felmenia...

Suimei : "Is there something wrong with me?"

Felmenia: "...No"

Since earlier, she had turned towards him god knows how many times, glancing at him furtively, and gave up on her curiosity that was mixed with a little hostility. But, she just continued to face forward as if nothing had happened.

"Having been on guard with magic was a mistake. In that situation, it is probable that they have seen that I can use magic," Suimei groaned to himself silently.

He had made mistake after mistake. He currently just wanted to go hide himself in a hole.

The existence of magicians and magic should be hidden. In his old world, the present had been dominated by science, and magic was, no matter what, considered heretical. This was common sense in the old world after the suppression of magicians had finished. However, in this world, how did treatment towards magic become like this? An existence that became an imperial court mage was together with a princess? That was on the level of royalty. However, the ordinary status for mages and magic was not yet entirely clear.

It would be a simple matter to reveal the existence of magic in the old world, but foolish. First of all, it would be unacceptable for Reiji and Mizuki to learn of such things, even if they were good friends with him.

In that case, the top priority was how to stop that information from being divulged. This, even if it could be leaving them out, was a needed countermeasure.

Titania: "We've arrived. Here is my father's audience room; let's go in."

Between the passage and the room, they arrived at a huge, grandiose door, and Titania urged them inside.

One of the soldiers quickly called out to the guard at the door, who muttered something in reply.

Before long, the magnificent door slowly opened.

Reiji: "Wha-!?"

Mizuki: "Eeh!?"

Reiji and Mizuki were shocked. The door suddenly opening had come as a surprise.

The guard hadn't even touched the door, and they hadn't seen any automatic opening or closing mechanism. They didn't completely understand what had just happened.

While holding back his surprise, Reiji hastily asked Titania, "Ho-How did it open?"

"...It was by magic. Was it that surprising?"

"Ah... In the world we lived in, magic didn't exist."

"Really? So then that was your first time seeing it?"

Titania was smiling ear to ear upon hearing his impressed voice.

On the other hand, Mizuki's eyes began to sparkle.

"...Amazing. Magic really does exist."

Mizuki seemed to hold an interest in magic. *She was a girl who liked stories involving magic.*

And Suimei over here had, of course, noticed the use of magic. Although he hadn't caught what the guard had mumbled, *the spell's composition, the magic formula's expansion, the assignment of the spell, the results, and the magic's invocation, he had all noticed.*

"Wind, huh," he thought to himself.

The thing that had opened the door was simple magic. The incantation was three sections long, and the magic was wind attribute and just physical displacement. However—

Even though it was only to open the door, why did using a single attribute take so much time? No matter how many of those spells of that degree were to be casted, using a three-section chant for one is too impractical...

Suimei seemed to be the only person shocked by such flawed magic.

All that was needed, to open even that unusual door, was simple magic. By converting magic power into an optimal state, one would only need to construct the barest minimum of magic formulas, and by invoking it, the same result would have occurred.

Even though that was all that was required, the guard had even went so far as to forcibly apply the wind attribute, and thus Suimei did not understand. Not only would it increase the length of the incantation, it would also increase the required magic power.

In other words, it was completely impractical. It's common sense that such a spell wouldn't even require chanting. If it was Suimei, he would only need to move a finger, and the door would have opened "by itself" in the same manner it had done so before.

Who in the world would invest so much into opening the door in such a senseless manner? To Suimei, it was incomprehensible.

"Well, I guess it's just something the guard wanted to do..."

Suimei rationalized such thoughts as this, saying the guard just wanted to use the wind attribute for opening and closing the door.

While Suimei was thinking about such things, Titania abruptly spoke.

"Suimei-sama isn't surprised about magic?"

Shit.

"Eh? Oh, I don't really get surprised at many things...Hahaha."

"Oh, is that so? But, if this degree can't surprise you, did you know, if

you see an imperial court mage training, (s)he might even be able to omit the chant?"

"That amazing? Ah...I give up."

"Ufufufu..." laughed Titania, merrily and in a lady-like manner. However, Titania had misunderstood; Suimei had been surprised for a different reason.

The door took its time to open. Felmenia's voice rang out as she called to Titania.

"Princess, any time now."

"Yes. Well then, Hero-sama, Mizuki-sama, and Suimei-sama, after me," said Titania as she took the lead and went through the door.

Then, they came into an enormous, spacious room. *The rectangular, spacious room had countless stone pillars that were penetrated by powerfully drawn lines that separated the road from the rooms.* This was the audience room.

"Uwah..."

"Amazing..."

"Ooh.."

The three could not help but let out their surprise. In the audience room, there was a majestic building. Even Suimei, who was thinking about the magic from just then, was fascinated by it.

In the center of the room there was a magnificent throne, with a person seated on it. He was probably the king, Almadias Root Astel. Next to him, a confidant well past his prime could be seen, as well as a number of many other important people.

Without so much as a glance at her surroundings, only looking forward, Titania walked on ahead. She kneeled to the king, who was on an elevation one level higher than the rest. The next to kneel was Felmenia. The three hastily followed suit.

After the king nodded approval after seeing that everyone was there,

Titania began her report.

"Titania Root Astel has brought the summoned heroes."

"Good, my dear Titania. But...why are there three heroes?"

The puzzled king asked, and Felmenia answered this in Titania's stead.

"These two are Yuusha-dono's friends; they were somehow dragged into the summoning."

"What!? Dragged in!?"

"Yes, unfortunately."

Upon hearing her answer, the king hid his surprise by putting on an intrepid face. After that, the surroundings quickly became strife with confusion; questions such as "What do we do now!?" and "I hadn't heard of anything like this!" could be heard from amongst the chaotic shouts.

King: "But, can such a thing really happen? The summoning of heroes has been performed countless times up till now, by various countries, but such a thing has never been heard of, has it not?"

Felmenia: "That is...Even I don't know why the reason that such youths are here, with such limited information, but, the reality is that they are standing here. That's why... Even though it is unfortunate to have been dragged in, there's no changing it."

In the midst of his conversation with Felmenia, the king had changed his facial expression to a grim one.

The already predicted external affairs with other countries would presumably be rendered useless and thrown into confusion because of them.

Then, Suimei mumbled to himself.

"Various things had occurred as I had expected, but, other than us here, various other places have also summoned people? Since it appears that was what he meant, it was possible." In other words, they were needed since, in this world, a Maou had appeared.

To ask this of Mizuki, Suimei became fed up. Abruptly, and forcibly, summoning people from another world, essentially turning them into refugees, would stress them, but the fact that the existence said to be able to destroy the world does not summon a hero, and is forced to come out is a ridiculous story.

"Moreover, it looks like our situation is the first of its kind."

"I feel sorry for these people..."

While Suimei was whispering to himself, the the king and Felmenia's conversation had seemingly ended. It consisted of questions like, "Who's the hero?" and "Do the other people also have divine protection?"

And, this time, the king's expression had completely changed from one of grim seriousness to one of unyielding fortitude. With the return of his kingly face, he started speaking.

"Hero, I am sorry for abruptly summoning you to this kind of place. I am the thirteenth king of the Astel Kingdom, Almadias Root Astel. And this is my castle, the royal Castle Calmenia."

After the king had showed his subtly implied appreciation in his words, Titania whispered something to Reiji. It was probably something to do with propriety in such a case as this. Reiji immediately stood up.

"Ah?"

Suimei was confused, and the surroundings buzzed with noise. Clearly, the current state of affairs was unbelievable. An unthinkable story in the present day, but in this kind of world in the medieval age, the king is essentially considered the same as a god. In the company of such a person, and in a public place, such an act was tantamount to blasphemy.

Titania: "It's all right! Reiji-sama is the hero that was summonsed to save the world, so he has a lofty position. That's why, in this place, in front of my Father, he can speak as equals; there's no problem."

Suimei: "Is-Is that so?"

Titania had seemingly noticed and answered Suimei's fears. It seemed,

somehow, there was no problem. There was a temporary unease as to what would happen, but now there was a feeling of relief.

Accepting the king's thanks, Reiji spoke.

"I am Reiji Shana, your majesty. I am honored to have such a prestigious welcoming (audience)."

"Are you the hero?"

"Yes."

After Reiji addressed the king's inquiry, the surroundings stirred again. Questions such as "That person is the hero?", "What a divine countenance", and thoughts about how fascinating Reiji was spilled out.

When the surrounding voices had eventually died out, the king spoke.

"So, are the two people behind you your friends?"

"Yes. I am his friend Anou Mizuki."

"I'm Yakagi Suimei."

Mizuki and Suimei answered while raising their heads as they were on their knees. Since they were not heroes, they could not behave in the same manner as Reiji, or there would be problems.

"I see. I'm sorry for summoning you two as well. The fault lies in our side, but is there anything we can do for you in apology?"

"Yes."

"Huh?"

While the king was sitting on his throne, such a short answer had been given in reply.

The king, in his own way, had apologized, but their ignoring it had somewhat annoyed him.

The surroundings became bustling with noise again, with censure such as "What sacrilegious words!"; there was a wide difference between the time Reiji had spoken to the king and now.

"Ahem. I still have lots to discuss with the hero, but I guess here will do. It was an abrupt summoning. The hero is probably still confused."

"Eh—"

"Hero and his friends. After this, I will prepare seats for you at the evening party in the reception hall. As soon as the preparations are finished, come, and we will discuss the main problem tomorrow."

The hospitality would extend past that one night. This was the king's special consideration. Having abruptly been summoned, they might need special care.

At these words, the tension in the atmosphere dissipated. However, there was one person who dissented.

"No, your majesty. If it's possible, can we talk about the main issue here and now?"

"Are you sure, hero? You've just come here, and you have probably not steadied your resolve, right?"

"Yes. After all, this is the pattern in which we have to confront the devil king. I wish to ask about it as soon as possible."

The king showed his consideration for the hero's request after pondering over it.

"...Understood. Since that's what you, the hero, wish for, I'll tell the story."

But, that happened way too fast. It was impatient and abrupt. They still hadn't discussed about this unprecedented case with three people yet.

Suimei, driven by his impatience, asked Reiji in a whisper, "O-oi, Reiji! What do you intend to do? Do you have to answer after hearing this? Rather, it's a matter of course—"

"Suimei. That's enough, just leave it to me."

"What? Leave what to yo-Reijiiii!"

Before they finished talking, Reiji stepped out, with Suimei hot on his heels, whispering his dissent.

This was something Suimei absolutely did not want to be responsible for. To suppress the demon king — what the heck kind of fantasy story was this!? Provoking a fight with people who had basically zero combat potential and experience was not only insane, but also, in the first place, they were not obligated to do such a thing anyway.

Moreover, Suimei had a reason to quickly return. *He had promised his late father to leave behind the legacy of his new proposal about magic theory.* While it may be true that magicians are fated to always be at the risk of losing their lives, it doesn't mean that they would risk their life for anything.

While thinking such thoughts, he anxiously looked at Reiji's back. Although there was no reasonable reason for them to take responsibility, there was a soft-hearted person who deviated from the norm. He could not help but agree.

The king asked Reiji who had previously stepped forward.

"Until what part of the story have you already heard about?"

"Earlier, from the princess, I heard that you wanted me to defeat the Demon King. Besides that, I have heard nothing else."

"Is that so? Well then, Gless."

The king glanced at the temperate, elderly man that was nearby, who nodded. The man called Gless stepped out.

"I am Gless Duress, the Prime Minister of Astel. Well then, first, I will explain, starting from the current state of affairs."

"Please."

"To the north of here, the Astel Kingdom, about three countries away, there was a frigid country called Noxius. The northern Noxius was the boundary between demon territory and human territory, and the people who had been thwarting the invasion of the demons for a long time had been called to the northernmost bastion about half a year ago. However, the demons' lightning-like invasion had caused the capital to capitulate, and brought about the fall of Noxius."

With a grimness that leaked into the atmosphere, Prime Minister Gless continued the story.

"In spite of the fact that the people of Noxius lived in such a tense atmosphere, *they boasted a strength not inferior to that of the flat lands*, with a strong national army, but when faced with the invasion of the million-man demon army they couldn't stand tooth to tooth and they fell in less than a month."

Then, Mizuki, seemingly with difficulty, asked for the details.

"Um... Regarding the fall of Noxius, the people..."

"The demons have no need to take prisoners of war. At the time of the invasion, most of the citizens were killed by the demons, and those who survived the initial onslaught were hunted down. The few who survived had survived because of their good luck. *The Noxians, as a people, no longer exist.*"

"Man hunts, you said? That's..."

"Those are the kind of monsters that demons are. They completely look down on humanity, treat humans as if they were worms, *and they have more than enough strength to back it up*. We tried to negotiate, but their response was far from a reconciliation; rather, they did the reverse, and attacked us."

After Mizuki heard Gress's story, her face turned blue. Perhaps she didn't think there could be a story as cruel as that. *If the demons that were introduced to the girl often had friends, a bottomless (heretical doctrine?) pit thing, something about animals with help/salvation.*

Currently, everything was progressing like as if it were a story. *Including me, when there is a story-like development, there is often salvation, and we were still optimistic.*

However, the demons in this world are completely different from those in stories.

Although it was impossible to swallow the entire story, the fact remains that everything from the massacre to the complete annihilation of Noxius

was true, and they had to cross paths with such monsters.

“Then after that, according to the Salvation Church’s Oracle, the ruling demon changed to one called Nakshatra. He believes that if the demons are to be able to live freely, then humanity would need to be destroyed.”

“Countries that saw how dire the situation was each began to develop their own countermeasures. But, Noxius had already fallen, and they were essentially forced to assume that according to the scale of the demon army, their ideas that would break the deadlock could not work and plans disappeared one by one. That is how much we humans lacked the power to fight against the indomitable wizards.”

Pausing here, Gress looked at (the grandiose) Reiji.

“Thus, from time immemorial, each nation has relied upon summoning a hero from a different world. Originally, only the Magic Guild and the Salvation Church were able to hold this hero summoning ceremony, and under their agreement, this ceremony was only to be held when humanity fell into a great crisis, establishing a firm precedent. If each country were to only prioritize its own national interest and hold the summoning, then the world would become chaotic.”

“This world has that many problems...?” Reiji scrunched his eyebrows. (I really can’t think of the actual phrase here; it’s like when you’re “wtf” and your eyebrows go up and together). *He might just start crying too if Demon Kings kept sprouting up.*

“Yes. According to what has been passed down, two monsters (giants) that eat every and any living thing have appeared twice. Tyrants have attempted to grasp the world in their hands three times. This time’s attack on the Demon King will make it six times in total. And to avoid a crisis of this degree, Astel Kingdom is one of the four countries that is to perform the hero summoning ceremony.”

“Four countries...”

Upon hearing this unexpected news, Suimei started to mumble to himself. *They could possibly pressure some sorry other guys with such a ridiculous request as suppressing the demon king. When they refuse, they*

could always come up with some other safety measure, and Suimei and the others wouldn't have to be entrusted with an impossible task.

"And we are the summoned ones?"

When Reiji asked about the heart of the matter, Gless closed his eyes and confirmed.

"It is as you have said."

And, Gless put on a grim face again.

"Currently, the demon army's invasion has slowed down, but in the near future, the human countries in the world, and thus our country, will be trampled down by the humongous demon army. Like how Noxius was destroyed."

Gless's face lost its color, and his voice became heavy. It was an act that evoked sympathy. It was sly and somewhat disgusting, but if it the summoning was an international agreement, then failure would result not only in their loss of diplomatic face, but also in the loss of the people's faith. *As the prime minister who had no choice but to worry over the country, he had no plan, and he couldn't suppress the seeds of irritation in his mentality.*

After Gless had finished his story, seeing as good a time as any, the King spoke.

"Hero. This matter has absolutely nothing to do with you who came from another world, but, for the sake of saving this world's people, can you somehow help?"

"..."

"Please...Somehow or another?"

The King implored a second time to Reiji, whose head was facing downwards as if in deep thought.

"The King is, well of course, determinedly asking Reiji," thought Suimei.

But of course, Suimei, who didn't want to have anything to do with this matter, secretly prayed for Reiji. Since he was a magician, for the sake of

protecting both himself and his research, although he did have combat experience, did not really want to take part in such a ridiculous fight. He, of course, did not want to die.

Suimei, as if brushing aside his sliver of anxiety, earnestly prayed to the gods that Reiji would not accept.

Nobody dared to even gulp. After a brief period of silence, Reiji raised his resolute face.

And-

"I accept."

"Of course. He won't do it. He won't — Wait what?" thought Suimei.

He accepted. He actually accepted. What Suimei had thought he heard was just a figment of his own imagination.

"Is that so! That's-"

"WAIT A SECONDDDD!"

Suimei couldn't accept it. Completely drowning out the King's elated voice from before, his shout resounded throughout the audience room.

*Suimei revealed his inner thoughts with his shout, and stunned everyone in the audience room. Interrupting the King's voice was rude, but the abruptness of the shout and the incredulity of the people led to nobody to criticize Suimei.

The soft-hearted person who had accepted had a look of utter confusion on his face.

"Wha-what happened Suimei? Raising your voice so suddenly..."

"This dim-witted person! The one who accepted and has a rotten brain is you! You just said you'd fight a dangerous guy who'd destroy the world! Why do we have to fight a guy who has an army of god knows how many millions of demons!? Is it weird for me to shout out in a loud voice when you didnt even consult us about it!?"

Suimei had shouted incessantly, all without taking a breath. Reiji, with

unyielding eyes, looked at Suimei who was now panting for breath.

"But, because of that Demon King, lots of people have had unfortunate experiences, and more will experience the same. Thus, the people's last resort was to summon a hero, and they called me. That's why I'll do anything and everything within my limits to help."

"How did it become like this!? We have absolutely no reason to help!"

"Yeah. It's undeniable that today is the first time we came to this world. It is as you said; we have no obligation to help. But there is hope. *Hope is the essence of every person. Aren't humans just a pile of hope?* Moreover, a sense of duty isn't present from the beginning; isn't it something you create?"

Reiji answered in a somewhat cool, philosophical manner. *no idea here*

"That is certainly true, but...Rather, that kind of philosophy has nothing to do with the matter at hand! First of all, how can you possibly do it by yourself!?"

Just now, the question thrust at him by Suimei stopped Reiji in his tracks. Reiji was just a student. Unlike Suimei's case, Reiji had no experience with fighting. Without even speaking of his ability to fight, any means to win could not be seen.

But even then, Reiji shook his head.

"You don't understand. There's an amazing power in me right now. I might be able to defeat the Demon King if I have this power."

And thus, the matter was settled.

"What amazing powerrrrrr!? There's no way you could even TRY to beat him! You're basically saying great things like "Let's fight against their huge numbers, Aniki!" indifferently! No matter how much power you have, there's no way you can fight against an army of several million!"

"No, I can't tell without having tried. The people who have been summoned into this world have the power to save it."

That is certainly what is said to be the case. *However, in the end, that*

might just be a story passed down by humanity.

Thus.

"So that's how it is."

"This kind of result is unchangeable. I cannot abandon troubled people. It may not be smart, but I wish to cooperate with the people of this world."

"Reiji. Again, you..."

Suimei, upon hearing Reiji's sincere words, lowered his tone. After that, there may have been a hint of compassion. This could be said to be Reiji's weakness. He cannot neglect people in trouble. It's been like that since the olden days. He's been like that since the day Suimei had met him.

He would run about, trying to save someone, drag in someone else like him, but he would save everyone in the end. He was a man who could not discard this weakness. That is the person known as Shana Reiji.

Since he was his good friend, Suimei understood Reiji's character quite well.

"Suimei. If you think it's unpleasant, you don't have to. Honestly if you're with me, it's reassuring, but the one who received power is me. You don't have to come with me."

"You... Certainly, I don't want to go, but that...!"

"Yeah. I know. You'll worry about me right? You were always the one who followed up for me if I wasn't enough."

Saying it in such a way was kind of sneaky. Exactly since Reiji was this type of guy, Suimei could not ignore him and started to hang out with him.

But still, this time-

"I'm definitely not going. Dragging me into this kind of mess...I don't want to die yet."

As expected, he still declined. There was no choice. However one could

think about it, it was too reckless.

"Okay. Sorry, Suimei."

"If you're going to apologize, you might as well not do it..." said Suimei, as if done speaking, with his voice having returned to that of one without surprise or resignation.

Now, Reiji turned to Mizuki.

"I'm going to go defeat the Demon King. Thus, I want you to stay with Suimei, Mizuki."

In front of the Reiji's display of determination, Mizuki's face was cast down, and she was shaking. She was thinking about something.

There was no reply for a brief period of time, but before long, Mizuki, who had stopped shaking, raised her resolute face and looked at Reiji.

"...No, I'll go with you."

"Mizuki..."

"You too, Mizuki," Suimei had said in a puzzled voice. He did not think another one of his friends would possibly say such an unrealistic thing. The same unrealistic thing as what Reiji had said.

"Mizuki, you can't. What I'm about to do is life-threatening. That's why I can't bring you with me. I don't want to put you in danger."

When Reiji had refused Mizuki's request, she shook her head.

"Since there won't be peace anyway if you don't defeat the Demon King, everywhere is dangerous. That's why, even if it's a little, I want to help you. I'm not sure if I can do anything or even if I understand, nor do I understand if I have the same feeling you do, to help the people of this world, but I still want to go with you."

"It'll be dangerous. I'm not sure if I'll be able to protect you."

"Okay. I won't mind even if you abandon me. So please..." That was undoubtedly not what Mizuki wanted. However, to stay with her important one, she had lied.

Reiji, after some consideration, spoke.

"Okay. If you're going so far as to say that, let's go together. However, I will never, no matter what happens, throw you away, okay?"

"Okay..." answered Mizuki. *no idea* She was happy, but in her eyes you could see a faint resolve, and some tears.*

"Your Majesty, the King. The matter concerning the Demon King, I will take on. The two of us will face him."

"Understood. Mizuki, are you really sure about this?"

"Yes!"

The King sent a happy-kind of like towards Mizuki who had responded so cheerfully, and then turned his gaze to Suimei.

"Suimei, you still..."

"I cannot fight against such an absurd amount of troops. I won't go with them."

"Is that so..." His voice had a somewhat apologetic tone, rather than one of regret. As expected, *he had somewhat mixed feelings regarding the summoning.*

Despite the King's reaction, the surrounding criticized Suimei. Things like "Even though that girl is going, that boy..." and "He has no pride whatsoever" could be heard.

"These guys that don't move out of their safe spots say whatever they like. Well, I'm not really in the position to say anything, since I decided I wouldn't go... There's a more important matter to attend to, after all." thought Suimei.

Suimei released his pent up frustration with a sigh, and paused for a bit, before asking the King for a favor he needed at any cost.

"Your Majesty, the King. I have but one favor to ask; may I?"

The surroundings became bustling with noise again, and such exclamations as "What insolence!" and "You're in no position to ask His

Majesty the King for a favor!" but they were ignored.

The King, in particular, did not seem to mind; he did not raise his voice and responded.

"Go ahead."

"Okay. Since I won't go help suppress the Demon King, I want to find a way to return to our original world."

He would not go fight. Thus, there would be no reason for him to stop in this world. He wanted to use the summoning ceremony again to quickly return to his own world.

However, for some reason, the King did not reply.

"....."

Instead, a heavy silence swept over the room. If one were to look at the surroundings, one would see Reiji with a puzzled look, and Mizuki with a face as if she had just realized something. Titania and Felmenia's faces were of a poor complexion, and were as if they had just eaten a bug.

The source of this was something bad. Suimei had just asked to return. Then, their faces had become like this.

Then, a hypothesis had popped into Suimei's mind.

"Hey, wait. It couldn't be..."

Suimei no longer used honorifics. It was natural, as his guess did not hit far from the target.

Before long, the King opened his mouth with resolution.

"Sorry, but you cannot return to your original world. Don't get me wrong; it's not that I don't want to return you. Rather, a method to send you back does not exist."

"What the FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUCK!?"

Suimei's second scream of the day resounded throughout the audience room.

Isekai Mahou | Chapter 5 : Until Friend's Departure

It's been two weeks since Suimei and his friends were summoned into this world and tasked with destroying the Demon Lord. Even now, Reiji is still undergoing training and will leave in a few days.

While the training is steadily progressing, Suimei is in a room reading books. Most of the genres are varied and almost everything he can get his hands on. The reason is of course to collect information about this world. He still remembers freshly the other day, when they were told that they can't return home. And so, they are forced to live here.

Even though he hated being summoned before, he doesn't care now, or more likely, he doesn't have the time to care. There are things he must do now no matter what.

That is, of course, collecting information.

The majority of the books he's studying include Law, Unwritten Law, Culture, Fundamental Knowledge, and the existence of the previous world. As mentioned before, they have to live here now. Resisting blending into this world's lifestyle will only bring trouble.

It's unknown whether it's caused by the Hero Summoning or not, but they can understand this world's language. Because of that, he can read the books. The information he has collected here has become quite a lot.

And then, the book Suimei is reading right now is about a hero who succeeded God's power and defeated the dragon that plunged the world

into darkness. It seems this hero's story is an orthodox one that is widely known. While taking a breather, Suimei is reading this book.

It seems he became interested and didn't realize that he kept turning the pages until he finished it. Eventually, the hero destroyed the dragon and returned home and brought happiness to the world. It sure is a happy ending.

"Hero huh..." (Suimei)

Muttered Suimei while closing the book.

Well, setting aside this Hero, the current Hero right now is training with Mizuki who insisted upon going with him. They are now undergoing the training of Astel's Imperial Guard's Knight Captain and the Imperial Sorcerer. They got sword and combat training from the Knight Captain, and all kinds of magic from the Imperial Sorcerer.

Even though he felt that two weeks was unreasonable, he kept his mouth shut, in a good way.

"Haa..." (Suimei)

While thinking of Reiji, Suimei sighed.

Sometimes he can see the training from the window. He got the info from Reiji and Mizuki who visited him twice a day. From the info, though little, it seems harsh.

Reiji was just a normal human in the previous world. Of course, upon receiving sudden war training, he got beaten up. But, it seems this only applied for the first two days. On the third day, he was already able to fight on par with the Knight Captain, and able to handle multiple opponents.

Suimei didn't know if this is because of the Hero's Blessing or not, but the growth rate is unbelievable. If he were to put it, it's like a sponge. Not how a sponge absorbs water, but how a sponge pumps out water.

Seeing that, of course, he felt his efforts were being denied, and felt sad.

"That's cheating, definitely." (Suimei)

It's remarkable, even in Magic. Reiji can do what took Suimei 2 years in just 3 days. Only 3 days!

Suimei didn't even want to look at it anymore.

"Mu..." (Suimei)

Suddenly, Suimei heard footsteps and felt a magic presence. It seems they are coming this way, it's probably visitors.

And the visitors are....

It seems it was Reiji and two others. The two others are Mizuki, and Titania who wants to help him all the time. This causes Mizuki to cling onto Reiji. Noticing that they are coming, Suimei quickly goes to the desk and conceals everything there with Magic.

The Suimei right now is always secluded in this room. Everyone thinks that he's always sleeping alone here. He limits contact with others to the minimum to conceal his identity. It's because if he's in contact with other people, the risk of getting caught is higher. Of course, he never attended the party on the second day. He always gets his food sent here anyway. He only leaves this room to go to the library, to the summoning room, to secretly check on Reiji, and, of course, the toilet.

It's a natural thing to do conceal his identity. He didn't want to get his power exploited.

He also didn't want Reiji to know. And he also got more freedom this way anyway. In return, the castle's opinion of him has dropped drastically.

It's because he made a speech back then in the Audience Room to persuade Reiji from becoming the hero. And then he always holed up here. He's confident that the King and Titania are making fun of him.

Suimei doesn't care because it's a cover. And of course, he wants it to continue like that.

While thinking that, Suimei crawls up to the bed, and Reiji's voice can be heard.

"Morning Suimei, wake up yet?" (Reiji)

"Ah, come in." (Suimei)

"Excuse me." (Mizuki)

"Excuse me." (Reiji)

Suimei woke up and, as usual, they sit in their respective chairs.

"Then, what happened today?" (Suimei)

"Eh? That was sudden, Suimei." (Reiji)

"Somehow, you have a different atmosphere today." (Suimei)

"Hahaha, as expected, I'm busted?" (Reiji)

"I guess." (Suimei)

Reiji is laughing, embarrassed, and Suimei is nodding.

He noticed something was different when Reiji came in. Even if his face is bleeding a bit, Suimei can feel that Reiji experienced a good thing.

Then, Reiji asked.

"I learnt body strengthening magic today, wanna see?" (Reiji)

"Hoh? Show me." (Suimei)

I see, that's the reason. It seems he's happy having learned a new magic. And I understand it well. People want to test it when they acquire new magic.

Reiji is stretching his body, and loosening up. It is body strengthening magic; it strengthens the whole body at the same time. Stretching like this is essential.

"Here I go." (Reiji)

Then, Reiji spreads magic to his body, and surges it up in an instant without chanting.

"<Burn Boost>!" (Reiji)

When Reiji casts the magic, his body is suddenly covered in flame. He's now even stronger than he was when he was summoned.

"Ohhh." (Suimei)

Suimei lets out a voice of admiration upon seeing this. The execution is excellent. He handles the process very well. Even though it's not really efficient, but to do this in two months is something admirable.

It looks like this magic is of the fire attribute. His power is amplified. Also, the wind attribute will hasten movement, the water attribute will smooth movement, and the earth attribute will harden the body.

Suimei is analyzing Reiji's body strengthening magic. Titania is entranced by this sight and approaches him.

"As expected, Reiji-sama is awesome." (Titania)

"Ahahaha. Thank you Tia." (Reiji)

Said Reiji while smiling, and that name is like a pet name. When did they get this close?

Mizuki is pissed a bit seeing Titania.

"Tia, isn't that a bit too close?" (Mizuki)

"Isn't it fine Mizuki? Mizuki is always close to him, isn't it fine to let me this time?" (Titania)

"Eh? N-No! I'm not close to him!" (Mizuki)

"That's not true. Mizuki is always close to Reiji-sama. It's unfair." (Titania)

The topic was about Reiji's strengthening magic, but there's a spark between them.

"Hm, Reiji is quite cool huh..." (Suimei)

"Eh? That's right! This magic is convenient, I like it." (Reiji)

"It unexpectedly looks quite cool..." (Suimei)

This is Suimei's true opinion. It looks like dragon's flame. The impact shown on the other party is obvious. Be it admiration or fear. It's quite an advantage.

Thinking that, somehow Mizuki turns to Reiji, not me.

"I-I can do it too!" (Mizuki)

"Is that so? As expected, Mizuki is working hard as well." (Reiji)

"Um, well, yeah..." (Mizuki)

Suimei has a blank look hearing the response. It looks like because of Titania's actions, Mizuki can no longer see anyone besides Reiji.

"Kukukuku..." (Suimei)

"Wh-What's the matter Suimei-kun?" (Mizuki)

"Ah, it's nothing, good luck." (Suimei)

"Yeah, I won't lose!" (Mizuki)

When he thinks about the talk that one of them will become the Demon Lord, it seems impossible watching this situation.

After that, I try to ask again.

"Then, what else?" (Suimei)

"Eh? Well, various things..." (Reiji)

Reiji answers that while averting his eyes, it seems this is the cause of what Suimei felt.

"What's wrong, Reiji-sama?" (Titania)

"Eh? It's nothing." (Reiji)

"Ojou-sama, is there anything strange that happened?" (Suimei)

"Eh? I don't think anything happened. More like that Reiji-sama got another cool thing." (Titania)

It seems the princess didn't lie. Then, what made Reiji like this? Why is he trying to deceive us?

I asked Titania the details.

"That is?" (Suimei)

"Eh? That is..." (Titania)

Reiji tried to stop her, but Titania continued, trying to brag.

"All magicians from Astel's guild's specialists came to practice with Reiji-sama." (Titania)

"Eh~ Magician Guild huh..." (Suimei)

Magician Guild. Though I haven't researched the details, it's true that it exists.

"And because of that, everyone gathered to welcome them." (Titania)

The specialists are probably the executives there.

"Is it that rare?" (Suimei)

"Yes. That's because they have their own business." (Titania)

That's why it's rare for them to gather. The various specialists are more

interesting.

"By the way, what do you mean by various?" (Suimei)

"Fire, water, wind, earth, thunder, wood, light. They are the best of them. They can easily surpass our magicians. And they each have their own Emperor nickname. Like the Emperor of Fire or Emperor of Light." (Titania)

"....." (Suimei)

Is it fine? Emperor is a great name even in Japan. Even though there might be error since the language here has been converted into Japanese, it's still great.

"Suimei-sama, are you interested?" (Titania)

"Then, who won?" (Suimei)

"Of course, it was Reiji-sama's victory!" (Titania)

Titania happily brags about it.

"And then, he got a title from the Guildmaster." (Titania)

"A title?" (Suimei)

A title is something that represents a person's achievements, strength,

or features. Of course, this is only in fantasy.

Reiji is embarrassed and tries to change the topic.

"Isn't it fine not to tell him?" (Reiji)

But, seeing Reiji like that, Mizuki snickers.

"Fufufufu." (Mizuki)

"What's wrong Mizuki?" (Suimei)

"No, it's nothing." (Mizuki)

"Then, Princess, what's the title?" (Suimei)

"Suimei, please..." (Reiji)

"Because he conquered all elements, he is called the 'Supreme Ruler of All Elements.'" (Titania)

The moment she says that, the room is silent. But, Suimei can't hold it.

"Buhohohoho" (Suimei)

"Suimei-sama!?" (Titania)

"Ah, Supreme Ruler, of, all elements, ah, I can't take it, help me, hahahahahahahahahahahahhaa!" (Suimei)

Titania is confused as to why he's laughing. Reiji can only shake his head and Mizuki is laughing too.

While Suimei is laughing, Reiji says.

"See? I told you."(Reiji)

"Hm? Why? Receiving a title from the Guildmaster is a great thing. Why are Suimei-sama and Mizuki-sama laughing?" (Titania)

"Bu-But, it's 'Supreme Ruler of All Elements' you know? Just hear it, it's got no sense, it's got... Ah, my stomach hurts. Fuahahahahahahaha."
(Suimei)

"Suimei, please, stop it..." (Reiji)

The laughter echoes and the story ends here...

"North building... Nothing strange..." (???)

Eji, with the military boots, is patrolling. Eji is checking the last room at the north building.

That's right. That night, Eji was patrolling. This is the daily task every night. The job is to defend the castle at night when everyone is sleeping.

Camelia is different between day and night. At day, it's bright. At night, it's completely different. Usually, they have candles, but as to boost the economy, now, it's all not lit up.

The only light is the one in Eji's hand. And Eji has to go patrolling in the darkness. Nobody wants this job since it's creepy. Eji is forced to do this job and has to remember every nook and cranny.

"I hope it'll end soon..." (Eji)

Anyway, it would be stupid if anyone tried to invade this place with the hero in it.

The king himself issued Eji to strengthen the security.

Eji also once saw the hero's training. It's very harsh. The hero Reiji fought against the Knight Captain and now he can defeat many men easily.

So, even though it's the hero, they are afraid and want to strengthen security, since their best men have been defeated. Though, Eji saw this as unreasonable.

That time, Eji saw a human figure.

"Hm?" (Eji)

Eji heard the sound of metal, and immediately turned the candle to the source.

"Is there anyone there?"(Eji)

There's no response. What's left is only the spooky room mages use.

Eji has been here before. There was nothing strange. But, back then, there was a metal statue.

"Peter? Is that you? Stop the bad prank."(Eji)

Eji anxiously called the name of his friend that usually pulls pranks. He tried to look ahead, but it's all painted black. And he can't hear his friend's usual laughter.

Then, the similar "GASHAN" sound is heard again.

Eji's back is trembling. Could it be? An intruder? Even his friend wouldn't go this far. Eji wouldn't know where it got the info from, but it might be a demon trying to kill the Hero. Eji drew his sword and slowly approached. Eji also prepared a flute to call reinforcements in the worst case. And then-

"What? Hmph, there's nothing." (Eji)

It's only the statue in front of the room. Well, there's no way a demon

would be here anyway. It's only natural.

In the first place, there's no way anything would be crawling in the castle at night, other than Eji. Having confirmed that, Eji felt tired and went to bed.

"Whoa, that was close..." (Suimei)

Suimei waved his hand in front of the sleeping Eji, and felt relieved.

He never thought he'd meet a guard here. The guard is not a magician, just a normal human. He should not be able to get caught practicing magic here, though he didn't expect anyone to be awake.

In the first place, the source of the issue was the armor beside him...

"No no, to think they left an automaton here. There was nothing before..." (Suimei)

For safety, Suimei took another glance at the armor.

Automata are golems that have imitations of built-in organic functions. They can be programmed to perform automated actions. Like androids.

It's one of the mysteries of Hebrew and Kaballah in the previous world. There's no technique there to create it. Setting that aside,

When Suimei touched it, it was disassembled and became scraps. Loud noises were created, but everybody was sleeping, so no one came.

Suimei sighed. The first noise was when he got near the armor, and the second one was when he destroyed it.

(But, it sure is quite well made. I've never seen something like this before coming here. It's like it's not something the people here created...)
(Suimei)

But, where did they get this? When he came here, he realized its existence. He noticed the risks. – This is quite well-made.

The automaton absorbs magic from nearby intruders. It's a good counter against magic and physical attacks. It also has a sword which makes it aggressive and powerful.

Cool, and cruel...

"But, that girl, seriously, what's she's thinking? Just because this is inside the castle, she did something like this. She's got no sense of responsibility." (Suimei)

He complained to the non-existent Felmenia. Even if they are both magicians. To think that she'd prepare a trap like this. Where is the service they boast? Now that the great me has come, I won't show any mercy.

"Ah... I guess it's natural for a mage..." (Suimei)

That's right. Magicians are magicians. You can target their research, and in return, they will try to kill you. It's common sense here. Though he doesn't know that for sure.

He looked again to the remains of the armor... It's alright if it's Felmenia, but it's bad if anyone else finds it and makes ruckus.

“Kay, let's fix it...” (Suimei)

Magic surged from his feet. A red circle was created below him. The magic circle rotated and became bigger. After connecting several strings, it stabilized.

And then-

“<Renovatio Redivivus>” (Suimei)

“Rather than a repair, it's more like returning it to its previous state. The circle separated into two from below the armor. It rotated and flew up. The parts return back to their original places. When the magic circle reached the top, the armor was back again.

“Good. Just like before. Not good, not bad.” (Suimei)

Bragging a little about his magic, he tapped the automaton. It can't move anymore. Since the magic inside is already destroyed, this is nothing but a wreck shaped like the automaton.

Suimei entered the room the automaton was guarding; it was another room other than the archive room.

That's right. It's the summoning room.

The purpose was to analyze the summoning circle and find a way to reverse it. If that can't be done, he just has to make it himself. And now, he's rummaging through the summoning research book.

I want to return. I have a duty to my father. To achieve it, it's best to return there with the research results, magic items, and research materials.

Even though he's sure he can do anything here if given the time, he doesn't want to waste anything. He doesn't know if he can make it there in time. Time is scarce. That's why the top priority is to return home.

That's right, and the other reason is...

"They both also want to return right..." (Suimei)

Said Suimei with a faint voice, while looking up the ceiling.

Suimei knew that Reiji sometimes looked up at the sky. Suimei knew that he had lingering affection for the people he left there.

He also knew that Mizuki was always sobbing alone in her room,

wanting to be at the side of her loved ones, despite the fear, to stop the loneliness.

While thinking that, something came up in Suimei's heart.

He couldn't describe it, it was something hot... That morning he was supposed to meet his family. Those people that he can't meet again. Embracing the sadness and sorrow. He knew he would have to say goodbye someday, but as long there is hope, he won't give up.

That's why he learned magic from his father, to overcome anything no matter how unreasonable.

"This is not like me, well, I guess I have to work hard." (Suimei)

He was determined. He can't take it back once he said it. That's why he said it. Since he won't be going with them, he swore to find alternatives.

While he's determined, a magic presence could be felt...

Even if they tried to hide it, it's a human presence. No. It was not a normal person. It was Felmenia Stingray. She stood out in front of the automaton and then came in. It seems she saw the opened door.

He knew she was tailing him and purposefully left a trail. But to think she was this persistent...

Maybe she's observing me...

She peeked for a while, and then left...

Then...

"The bait is effective, next is the timing stage huh..." (Suimei)

That's right. This is an appropriate punishment for dogs who like to sniff. They also intend to punish me anyway. In return, their surprised faces will be funny...

Isekai Mahou | Chapter 6 : The Court Mage's Doubt

It has been two days since Hero Reiji accepted the task to subdue the Demon Lord. Imperial Mage Felmenia Stingray will be teaching Reiji and Mizuki by order of the king.

And now, she's going to Reiji.

"It can't be... Hero's teacher..." (Felmenia)

She's grumbling while walking, but inside her heart there is joy. After all, out of all the senior mages, she was chosen to teach the hero who will save the world.

To think that she will be teaching the Hero, she can only chuckle. This means that she is trusted more than the other Court Mages, and that the King has high expectations of her.

"Fufufufu." (Felmenia)

She can't hold her laughter. She's glad there's no one around. She always has a serious persona, if the others see her laughing, it would be very embarrassing.

Setting that aside, on the subject of teaching, it seems that in the world Hero Reiji came from, there's no magic. That's why we're teaching him magic now. She can still remember when they were summoned, and when they saw magic for the first time. She clearly remembers their

sparkling eyes.

When she asked about Hero Reiji's world, it seems in exchange for Magic, they have a science called technology that everybody can use. It helped the civilization evolve. It was interesting. If they have time, Felmenia would like to hear more.

And then-

"Is that Suimei?" (Felmenia)

In the corridor, standing there, is Suimei.

Suimei Yakagi. An average person. Black hair, gentle eyes. Nothing more than that. He shows great wisdom when he's together with Reiji. That guy is walking ahead of her, but turns at the corner towards a different destination.

While seeing this, she thinks. The place he's going is the north side of Camelia. There's no kitchen nor toilet nor Reiji there. Why the hell is he going that way?

(Wait... I heard that Suimei was always holed up in his room after that dispute in the audience chamber.) (Felmenia)

She doesn't know much about his circumstances since she hasn't talked with him much. She heard that he only leaves to go to the toilet or to meet with Reiji and his friend.

She thought that, because he was summoned here suddenly, he was scared and holed up like a little boy.

"If so, what is he..." (Felmenia)

The north building is a place that people rarely go. Seeing this, Felmenia becomes interested.

Then, she realizes something.

(There's still time until the meeting. Then, I guess I will take a look for a bit.) (Felmenia)

And so, Felmenia decides to follow him. It's not only because she's interested, it's also because she has the responsibility to stop him from doing anything bad.

Not only that, that boy Suimei is keeping secrets to himself. That's why she has to watch his movements.

(That's right, when we greeted them, Suimei-dono was certainly...) (Felmenia)

That time, he tried to use magic. Out of those three, he's the only one who could use magic. No one noticed this but her.

But, the magic was canceled right away, and he pretended nothing

happened.

But, there's no mistake, it was magic.

Hero Reiji said that there was no magic in his world. In exchange, technology spread all over the place and helped civilization. Buildings were lined up neatly, and they could travel to the moon.

There were no lies in his eyes, nor was there any need to lie. That's why, why can Suimei use magic?

And now, the pursuit begins. Of course, Suimei didn't notice. He just kept walking towards his place of interest.

Then, when she turned at the corner...

"Tsu~"

"Kyaa!?" (Maid)

There were screams. It seems it was the maid. That scream must have been from her.

"I'm sorry, is anything hurt?" (Felmenia)

"I should be the one to apologize. I hope I didn't hurt Stingray-sama's beautiful face." (Maid)

"Eh? There's nothing on my face." (Felmenia)

"Then, in any other place?" (Maid)

"No. There's not even any dust left." (Felmenia)

Having seen the maid's exaggerated attitude, she smiled.

The maid put on a relieved face.

"Is that so? That's great." (Maid)

"Then, excuse me." (Felmenia)

"Y-Yes!" (Maid)

"Fumu." (Felmenia)

It wasn't the wisdom that comes with age, but what she learned, to have dignity as a Court Mage.

Having seen her blunder, the maid bowed.

"I-I'm really sorry!" (Maid)

"Haha, it's alright." (Felmenia)

The maid bowed again, and then, when Felmenia wanted to leave,

Felmenia realized suddenly.

"Excuse me, can I have a moment?" (Felmenia)

"Yes? S-Sure." (Maid)

"Before we hit each other, there was supposed to be another person that went through here, did you see him?" (Felmenia)

"Eh? There was no one but Stingray-sama." (Maid)

"What?" (Felmenia)

Unlike the normal Felmenia, having heard the maid's answer, she muttered...

"Is there anything wrong?" (Maid)

"I will ask again, is there really no one else that passed through here?" (Felmenia)

"Y-Yes." (Maid)

"You're not lying?" (Felmenia)

"Yes. I swear to God Alshuna. It's exactly as I told Stingray-sama" (Maid)

Felmenia threatened her, and the maid avowed, though Felmenia wouldn't use any physical force.

And then, Felmenia interrupted.

"There's no way you didn't meet anyone. Before we crashed, Suimeidono... I mean, Hero Reiji's friend came through here." (Felmenia)

"Hero's friend? But, I didn't meet anyone." (Maid)

Seeing the bewildered maid, Felmenia thought...

"What does this mean..." (Felmenia)

"Hm, Stingray-sama, I must go to the south tower..." (Maid)

"Ah, it's okay, you can go. Sorry for saying something strange."
(Felmenia)

"It's alright, then, I'll go." (Maid)

The maid bowed and left.

(.....) (Felmenia)

Felmenia was confused.

She didn't know what happened, but he disappeared right after turning. It's a mystery.

(Hm, there's still time, let's look inside.) (Felmenia)

While walking, she didn't meet anyone.

When she arrived at the north tower, she was surprised.

(Wha-) (Felmenia)

She found the door opened. There wasn't supposed be anyone coming here. Not only that, this door was sealed. It requires special magic to open it and yet... The only ones who know the spell are the King, the head mage, and me....

There's no trail of the King or head mage having been here, then why has it opened?

Felmenia erased her presence and went to the door. Due to this series of events, she couldn't help but be very nervous.

Felmenia stood and peeked inside. She could only see a figure standing there, carrying both a notebook about summoning, which is rarely seen in Astel, and something cylindrical.

(As expected...) (Felmenia)

She didn't know how the hell he opened the door, but by the fact that he is here, it's evident that he's a mage.

But-

(Gu-What should I do? Can I just go in right now?) (Felmenia)

This is a restricted place, normally she would show up right away, but this is the hero's friend, and furthermore, a mage.

Of course, she is confident that she could subdue him, but this is the hero's friend. It would become a big commotion. What if the Demon Lord subjugation is canceled because of this?

She couldn't decide.

But, I wonder, what is he doing...

(I guess he's researching about the summoning, but...) (Felmenia)

But, as they are both mages, she wondered why he was wandering around... normally to analyze a magic circle, a mage would need to stand there and analyze the circle only. She couldn't see him as anything but a normal person who doesn't know magic and isn't sure what to do.

But, the summoning circle itself is something that we don't understand ourselves, we can only use it. No one has been able to understand it.

In the end, Felmenia couldn't even let her voice out, or move. And after watching Suimei's weird behavior, she decided to go to the meeting instead.

"About Hero Reiji's friend?" (King)

Felmenia is now standing in front of the king in the audience chamber. The reason is, of course, Suimei. After that day, she tried to watch him. And now, she intends to ask the king.

The king is confused and the kneeling Felmenia nods.

"Yes. That's right." (Felmenia)

"Is it Mizuki Anou?" (King)

"No, it's the other one, Suimei." (Felmenia)

The King squints his eyes.

"From what I know, that one is holed up in his room and never comes out." (King)

"No. He has actually left the room numerous times." (Felmenia)

This is the result of Felmenia's searching. She found out that Suimei has gone out countless times. And, of course, no one knew.

Contrary to his deception, he's actually pretty active.

Hearing that, the king raises his voice.

"I haven't heard that from anyone." (King)

"It's because the seclusion is glorified. He's moving in secret." (Felmenia)

"No one has seen him?" (King)

"I suspect, I'm the only one who knows." (Felmenia)

That's right, there's no one but her. When she asked others, they insisted that he's never left.

"Then, why are you the only one who knows?" (King)

"I only met him walking by pure chance. It seems, he's using magic when no one is around." (Felmenia)

"Magic? Is it something you taught him?" (King)

"No. It's something he knew beforehand." (Felmenia)

The king is making a face of disbelief.

"But, I heard there's no magic there. Magic is just something from fantasy in Hero Reiji's world." (King)

"I also suspect that. But it's true that Suimei-dono used magic."
(Felmenia)

"Then, Hero Reiji lied?" (King)

"No, I don't think so." (Felmenia)

Nope. It's not a lie. It is true that Hero Reiji has a very high aptitude for magic, but he didn't know it before. And the king trusts him too.

"I believe so, but..." (King)

"Why is there a discrepancy in their story... right?" (Felmenia)

"That boy personally concealed his magic, and in the first place, the Hero didn't know of magic before." (King)

As expected, the king also tilts his head. Magic is a technology. Magic is inseparable from life. Magic allows people to evolve.

Even if it's unknown there, it's supposed to be no different than a technology in terms of usefulness.

"Your Highness, there might be a complex situation in the other world, but right now-" (Felmenia)

"The thing is, why is he doing so much to conceal his activities and magic?" (King)

"Yes." (Felmenia)

"Their movement is unrestricted, and since he just came to this world, there should be nothing to hide. Then, why? There's no reason to..." (King)

That's right; he is the hero's friend. The king even ordered the castle to be friendly with them and cooperate.

But...

"The problem is, where Suimei-dono goes..." (Felmenia)

"Where is it?" (King)

"Archive room. He has brought back several books from there."

(Felmenia)

"Hoh? I thought he only holed up in his room, to think that he goes there, since he can't return, he's probably trying to search for information." (King)

When the king hears "archive room", he is surprised, but then he just nods.

He thinks that Suimei doesn't want to lose to the absurdity of the summons, and wants to study.

The king admires him a bit.

That's true, but there's more.

"No. There's also evidence of him going to the forbidden room."
(Felmenia)

"Wh-What? But, it's not easy to go in there..." (King)

It's where the historically important data is stored. Therefore, it's forbidden and out of peoples' reach.

"Furthermore, with ease..." (Felmenia)

"Wha-, then he only goes out and comes back from there?" (King)

Felmenia takes a breath and continues...

"Even to the summoning room." (Felmenia)

"That's impossible. The only ones who can enter it are me, the head mage, and you." (King)

"Yes. But, somehow, Suimei can open it." (Felmenia)

The atmosphere is heavy. The door is layered with multiple earth magics. Only people who have a great understanding of the earth attribute can open it.

That shows the extent of Suimei's magic.

"What is he doing there...? Is a stupid question to ask, huh... Is he researching the summoning?" (King)

"I don't know, but I think that's right." (Felmenia)

"He wants to return that much, huh..." (King)

The king has a depressed expression, he feels guilty for calling them without their consent. A kind king.

It seems, the King opposed the idea of calling the Hero. He didn't want

to involve those other people that have nothing to do with this. He wanted them to succeed with their own power, but they will face many situations like this, and the world will eventually be destroyed.

However, he eventually feared the demon lord, and had no choice but to agree. The king tasted despair. And, then the king said heavily.

"Then, Felmenia, why are you not doing anything about it?" (King)

"Yes. I approached him by my own judgment, and if he causes an uproar... (Felmenia)

"I see. It's true that there might be a commotion." (King)

"Yes. And the information is still not enough." (Felmenia)

That's right, this information is still unreliable. It could be a misunderstanding. That's why she only spoke to the king.

"That's true. You will take action when something happens, right?" (King)

"Yes, of course." (Felmenia)

That much is obvious. That's why she's observing this much.

"And then, have you spoken to anyone else about this?" (King)

"No, only to you, the king." (Felmenia)

"Good. Don't speak of this to anyone until this is resolved." (King)

"Yes." (Felmenia)

The king wishes for no one to know about this, though Felmenia does not know why, she will obey.

And then, Felmenia asks about the plan.

"Your Highness, what should I do from now on?" (Felmenia)

She asks this because she doesn't know what to do with Suimei. But, she must do something, even if he is the hero's friend.

The king tilts his head.

"Mu? Isn't it fine to leave him? He doesn't want to be bothered. That's why he's doing it secretly. As long as he doesn't intend to do anything bad." (King)

"But, it's a forbidden place..." (Felmenia)

"Since he already went there, it can't be helped. There are only important books and maps, not that he can do anything with them."

(King)

It's true that it's useless since he's from a different world, but she still feels that the judgment is too soft. No-

(Is that the reason Your Highness didn't want anyone to know?)
(Felmenia)

If the people know, it will become an uproar, but if they don't know, it's alright.

That's why the king told her not to tell anyone...

The king's decision is correct. Though she still feels bitter about the idea.

"Then, Your Highness won't take any measures against him?" (Felmenia)

"Do you oppose?" (King)

"Suimei is a mage. There has to be some kind of action taken. I know that it's best not to involve the Hero's party, but if he is let free, it will affect the king's image..." (Felmenia)

"Personally, I don't care." (King)

From the King's expression, it seems he wants to resolve this matter as

soon as possible.

But, for her to back down here, it would be unbefitting of the title of Court Mage.

"Your Highness, this is somewhat a measure, but I won't do anything to scare them. If something happens, I will personally tell Reiji-dono."
(Felmenia)

"You have some confidence in persuasion." (King)

"Even if it's short, I'm still his teacher. He won't ignore my words."
(Felmenia)

Felmenia has some confidence, because she is the one who taught Reiji magic. If she says that his friend is doing bad things, he would have to do something about it. From their talks, she knows that Reiji hates bad people.

No problem. That's why, for now...

"That's why, I only need Your Highness' approval..." (Felmenia)

After thinking for a while, the king lets out a voice with a serious tone.

"No." (King)

"Your Highness! But!" (Felmenia)

"Felmenia, Suimei-dono is an important guest of mine too. I can't allow you to harbor any ill intentions towards him." (King)

"I-I don't have any ill intentions. I only want to take appropriate measures against he who is freely doing as he pleases!" (Felmenia)

Felmenia tries to persuade the King, but the King calmly points it out again.

"A no is a no. Got it, Felmenia?" (King)

"...." (Felmenia)

"Got it?" (King)

"Understood." (Felmenia)

Felmenia clenches her fist and bows.

It's been a while since things haven't gone her way. Since she became Court Mage, it's been a while.

The opponent is also a mage, which is frustrating. Even though she was rejected, she only becomes angrier and promises to pay him back ten thousand-fold.

(Not yet!) (Felmenia)

Even if the king doesn't approve, she won't back down. This is the court, the king's territory. She can't do as she pleases here. Basically, it's fine as long as the king doesn't know. She will secretly punish Suimei if something happens.

Yes, this can work. Suimei still hasn't noticed her, and if she does it secretly, no one will know.

Even if the opponent is a mage from somewhere she doesn't know. She can't allow insolent acts in Camelia. It's unforgiveable, and thus it should not be forgiven. From her position, this is her responsibility.

The king's image, the safety of Camelia, it's her self-proclaimed duty to protect them. Even if no one else will ever know, she doesn't care. She will make that insolent boy know his place.

"sigh Felmenia is still young huh..." (King)

Said the king, Almadius, after Felmenia left.

He could see Felmenia's youth will instigate something. She won't give up. She will do something without others knowing.

Well, it can't be helped. I'm sorry for the boy, but I guess I can just scold her later.

"Wisdom is a difficult thing huh..." (King)

Recently, Felmenia has been so prideful. It's unknown whether it's because of her strength or her duty. It's true that she's too strong.

The King sighed again.

(TL Note: Now we know who will cry when got bullied. Such a petty pride. Muehehehehe.)

Isekai Mahou | Chapter 7 : Can't go against the gap in power

That night, Astel's King Almadius was standing in front of the north building in the deepest part of Camelia. Felmenia was standing in silence.

(This is... What...) (Felmenia)

She could only let out such words of embarrassment. The cause was none other than the armor in front of her. This armor that was placed here was created by a rather famous mage, even among the mages in Astel's history. A golem capable of moving on its own. It was produced by the great sage that had a big role in developing Camelia. This product was something that he could only create once a lifetime.

Why was this thing here? Of course, it was placed by Felmenia to "stop" Suimei Yakagi. It's something she brought out from the treasury.

She thought that Suimei would come here again. But, when the guard's patrol was over, the golem was standing still... That's why they thought he hadn't come, but, then why was the door open...

When she checked the immobile golem, it seemed that the golem had been reduced to nothing but a wreck with the appearance of a golem.

(What a cruel thing to do to this golem...) (Felmenia)

Muttered Felmenia, while shocked...

There's no doubt that the golem was activated. She had already checked its functionality before, even though this was an artifact, it was as good as new.

If it has been activated, then it must have encountered Suimei. But, there's no trace of battle anywhere. Impossible... The golem was made for defensive purposes. When Felmenia tested it too, its functions couldn't be easily disabled.

Then, how did he reduce it to this state? The inside was literally destroyed, only its appearance has been maintained.

What magic did he use to fix it? Even if he destroyed it by force, it couldn't be like this. There's no trace of magic, and the situation has made clear that the golem is okay.

The culprit was standing and wandering about the room. It was as if he didn't even care about Felmenia.

(Fuck.) (Felmenia)

Due to her wild imagination, she uttered a word she had never used before. Such vulgar language. Felmenia Stingray, who was considered a genius, the youngest to ever climb to the rank of court mage, could no longer restrain herself. She was outraged. Even though she knew that he didn't even notice her, she couldn't hold it in. She won't let anyone underestimate a court mage.

(Fine, bring it on. I will make you reflect on your foolish actions. I will show you the true depths of magic you don't know. I will let you taste it. Definitely.) (Felmenia)

Inside this girl who is called White Flame, a Dark Flame was burning. She had become obsessed, and lost sight of what's right and wrong.

That's right, as of this moment, her sense of duty, responsibility, and her beliefs had been blinded by her pride.

To the boy from another world that left his back wide open, she muttered.

(Suimei Yakagi, I will show you the true strength of the White Flame.)
(Felmenia)

While she muttered that, she had no way of knowing of the despair that would soon destroy her pride. (TL Note: Muehehehehehe)

That night, a few days after the golem incident, when everyone was asleep in Camelia, Felmenia was tailing the lone boy.

She took this chance when he was secretly taking a stroll. She would deliver the hammer of judgment upon this boy who neglected the king's authority. She put a reasonable distance between them, and continued

the chase.

Of course, like always, there was no way Suimei could have noticed her. She always used wind magic to erase her footsteps and fatigue. And if she used concealment magic to erase her presence, there's no way anyone could notice. Anyone.

Suimei, without any hesitation, strolled in the darkness. It seemed he was going to a different place this time. He was wearing something they called "Blazer" that seemed to be their school uniform or some sort.

He seemed to be wandering aimlessly. Even though Felmenia didn't know where he was going, she intended to show up herself and personally deliver judgment.

(Tsu~!) (Felmenia)

There was a shadowy figure nearby. There wasn't supposed to be anyone awake. Who the hell...

But, it might've just been her imagination. If one thought normally, there was no one other than Eji who would go for a walk this late. Then, she tried to chase Suimei once again.

"He disappeared!?" (Felmenia)

There was no way for their eyes to have met. The moment she lost him, he erased his presence.

Even though he was supposed to be just ahead according to his walking speed, there was no sight of him.

But, if she couldn't see him, she could just search for him.

She instantly gathered magic and cast wind magic.

"Oh, wind. Become my servant. Show me the knowledge I seek. <Wind Search>!" (Felmenia)

What she chanted was wind magic. It would allow her to find the information she wanted.

Soon, she could hear the footsteps. It was quite far, but not that far.

There was a weird fixed rhythm in the steps. Without any further thought, she continued her chase.

“Here huh... Mu?” (Felmenia)

While running, she realized something.

(Wait... What lies ahead is...) (Felmenia)

Noticing the destination, she grew even angrier. The destination was the White Garden (白亜の庭園), which was the most prestigious place in Camelia.

Here is the place where the king spends his private time. It's not a place where you can just walk in. She couldn't take it anymore, she chased him while stomping the floor.

Beyond the stone passage, she went through a little garden and moved forward. She swore to punish him. When she went through the last passage, she was dazzled a bit by the moonlight. She began to accumulate her magic, and moved forward.

There, stood a lone mage.

The White Garden. Beside the tall obelisk in the center stood a boy, gazing at the stars, Suimei Yakagi.

The black sky, stretching from heaven to earth, and earth to heaven. A spectacular scene. With the moon covered in the dark night. The air was cold.

It was unknown as to when he changed his clothes, the “blazer” from back then was gone. His outfit had changed to “covered in black”. A flawless one-dress that can make one mistake his figure.

“Well, well, I don't think chasing someone and sniffing around is a good hobby you know? Those who do that are just stupid and pathetic stray sheep that know nothing you know?” (Suimei)

He smirked fearlessly. It seemed that he knew all along. It was like leading a lost child. He said that with a face of ridicule.

“No way... You knew?” (Felmenia)

"Well, if someone chases you with such pathetic skills, it's weirder not to notice it." (Suimei)

".....!" (Felmenia)

He said that, implying that it was a natural thing to notice her tailing him.

To think that he could see through her perfect concealment magic. It was unexpected.

That means that this time, it was an invitation.

She grinded her teeth. This was the first time she had felt so humiliated. She couldn't accept the fact that she'd been dancing in his palm all along. She was very angry. She was invited here. While still on guard due to this unexpected situation, she raised her voice to him.

"Then, you bastard, what do you intend to do?" (Felmenia)

"I don't have any plan. I was just taking a stroll. There's no rule that forbids people from leaving their rooms at night, right? That's why, for just this time, I tried to go to place I have never been before." (Suimei)

"Do you think you can deceive me with such reasoning? If you noticed me, why did you come here?" (Felmenia)

She couldn't hide her frustration, since she got busted. Then, Suimei laughed mischievously instead.

"As expected, it failed, huh? Hahaha." (Suimei)

"I will ask again, why did you come to this place?" (Felmenia)

"I wonder why... That's because..." (Suimei)

As expected, he only laughed. As if he was having fun because it was all going as he'd predicted. He stared at her with eyes that told her he saw through it all.

"That is, the same reason as you. Right?" (Suimei)

"....." (Felmenia)

"Oh? You chose to shut up? I was quite certain that it was the case. I

wonder if I was wrong..." (Suimei)

While saying that, moving his hand as if he were accustomed to it, he put on his black glove. There was nothing to be said anymore. She was frustrated that her plan got busted. To hide her frustration, she tried to change the topic.

"You bastard, where did you get those clothes?" (Felmenia)

Yeah, she had never seen those clothes before. The coat was long and pitch black. Beneath it, he wore a strongly woven decorative white shirt. And black trousers. That kind of clothing.

"Ah! This suit? I always wear this as my battle uniform." (Suimei)

"You always wear it? But, during the summoning, you didn't wear anything like that!" (Felmenia)

"It was in my bag. You saw my belongings right?" (Suimei)

Try to remember. It's true that she kept the belongings of those three before.

But,

"There's no way such clothes would fit into the container!" (Felmenia)

"Oi, no matter how much you use those remarks, it only makes you seem hard-headed you know?" (Suimei) (TL Note: Implying she's stupid.)

He shrugged with annoyance. That's right... He's a mage...

"I see. Magic tools huh?" (Felmenia)

"Though somehow it seems like a random answer, but well, yeah, correct. Though it looks like this, I use it a lot. This is one of my favorites you know?" (Suimei)

Suimei bragged a little. Magic tools: tools that hold power. Normally, a magic tool can demonstrate impossible power. It's true that if that were the case, it would make sense. But, she had never heard of a magic tool to increase storage capacity. She thought that it couldn't be applied by any of the eight attributes. But, if he has that kind of magic tool, it's probably

natural to brag about it.

After bragging about his bag and putting on his glove, he fixed his coat collar, and then interrupted daringly.

"Well, well, the night is nigh, shall we begin?" (Suimei)

"Don't joke with me. This is His Highness' special garden. Do you think a fight would be allowed here?" (Felmenia)

The White Garden. Fighting here would be an insolent act. Thus, she glared at him. But, Suimei only laughed and sneered.

"Heh... the White Garden huh? It's true that it's a bright place befitting of its name. But, do you really think this is the White Garden?" (Suimei)

"What are you talking about? The garden beside you and the white obelisk in the center are already proof. The garden here is filled with seeds from all over the kingdom. And what the king likes the most is, the spire..... Ah!" (Felmenia)

There was nothing there. It was supposed to be there. But, not even a shadow was left. She panicked right away. Realizing that, Suimei spoke so as to ridicule her.

"What's wrong? There's nothing on your left though? That thing that you probably want to talk about, is on your right though?" (Suimei)

After it was pointed out, she turned right away.

"Ridiculous, The king's room is supposed to be on the left side, why, why is it on the right side!?" (Felmenia)

The tower was there. She couldn't respond to this mysterious phenomenon. There was no reason. It was impossible. Just like he said, it was on her right.

Confusion and questions filled her head, what was going on? The throne tower was supposed to be on her left, though she never really goes there, she was certain. But now, it was on the right. What was going on?

Then, Suimei said while closing his eyes.

"That's right. There are two answers I can think up. It's either that you were mistaken, or, this is not the White Garden." (Suimei)

"That's ridiculous, there's no way..." (Felmenia)

"Is that so? Then why has the spire changed from your left to your right? Why does the moon rise from the right? Does this garden reverse it all? I dare you to tell me." (Suimei)

"Th-That is..." (Felmenia)

Even if he asked her, she didn't know the answer. It was true that everything here was somehow reversed. It was like a different world.

"<Phantom Road>" (Suimei)

"Phantom Road?" (Felmenia)

The word Suimei muttered was something she didn't know. It might have been something that he used, but she didn't understand it at all.

"That's right, this is inside a barrier I created. Everything is mirrored here. It's a world I created. It's what you call imaginary space." (Suimei)

"Wh-What? Imaginary space? What are you talking about? What did you do?" (Felmenia)

Even though he tried to explain his magic, she couldn't understand it at all. As a mage, she had never seen anything like this, nor thought that any of the elements could do this.

Magic was something that came from elements. Fire, Water, Wind, Earth, Lightning, Wood, Darkness, and Light. 8 elements. Magic always consisted of one of these elements. We brought forth the elements to the process, and magic was created.

But, there was no element that was supposed to be essential here. Nothing.

"Well, well, right from that part? I knew it. This world's magic is too far behind. That's why it became an unknown language and concept." (Suimei)

"This is magic? There's no way magic can transform the space like this. What elements did you use? There's no way." (Felmenia)

"Well, it's not only the appearance that changed, but is it that strange? This barrier is a bit too basic though?" (Suimei)

She had never heard of that kind of magic, even the attribute was strange.

"Barrier... magic?" (Felmenia)

"Oi, oi, don't tell me, there's not even the concept of barrier magic here?" (Suimei)

"What are you talking about?" (Felmenia)

"Barrier! B-A-R-R-I-E-R! Are you deaf or what?" (Suimei)

"I-I don't know! There's no such thing in this world!" (Felmenia)

"Seriously? I'm starting to feel peerless in this world you know?" (Suimei)

Suimei sighed upon hearing of the state of this world's magic. It seems he gave up explaining.

"Oh well, let's skip the hard part. Basically, this is not the White Garden, it's something I created with magic. That's why we can fight all out. No one would notice." (Suimei)

"Ugh..." (Felmenia)

Though she didn't know the details, she realized that this was a cage prepared by him.

After a few moments of silence, Suimei spoke.

"Well, I guess you're shocked upon learning many new things. But, remaining calm in these situations is a must. Shall we start now?" (Suimei)

"Do you really think you can beat me in magic? I'm Astel Kingdom's court mage, Felmenia Stingray. To face this coward, you are the one who's gonna lose!" (Felmenia)

She still thought that she could destroy this boy. That's right. Think about it. She's the White Flame. She's a mage that reached the pinnacle of flame magic. If it were to come to a fight, it's a sure-win. So far, she has destroyed many demons.

There's no way she'd lose in terms of magic power. This was, rather, an advantage for her, since she wouldn't be able to fight if she weren't in here.

Yeah, there was no reason to fear him...

"Even if you spout more gibberish, the result is clear." (Felmenia)

"Arara, that's quite the confidence. Do you really think you can defeat me?" (Suimei)

"Fine. I will show you the power of Felmenia Stingray, who has reached the true flame. The mage revered as White Flame in Astel Kingdom. Taste my flame!" (Felmenia)

"Mu... true flame?" (Suimei)

Hearing that, Suimei's expression changed.

Of course, my flame is true flame. Every mage that hears it will tremble upon hearing it and seeing it.

She will show her magic that she boasts of.

"Oh fire. Become the true flame and burn away those who stray from your path. Burn away everything. Become the white catastrophe. <True Flare>!" (Felmenia)

When she chanted it, a white flame swirled. The white flame sucked in the nearby wind, its temperature was many times hotter than a normal flame. A flame that burns everything.

"Na~" (Suimei)

Suimei, who was consumed by the White Flame, let out a weird tone. He just stood there. Of course, this was the revered, longed by all, inextinguishable, the prestigious White Flame. It's natural if he gives up.

Even though Suimei was surrounded by the flame and was bewildered. He suddenly snapped his finger timidly.

Suddenly, the flame lost its color, and turned red instead.

"Wh-What!?" (Felmenia)

As her confidence was fleeting, the flame gradually disappeared.

Suimei, who was burned a while ago, looked at the scenery for a while, and turned to her.

"Hmm, is that all?" (Suimei)

His expectations were betrayed by this puny result. It was anti-climactic.

The only thing that came from her mouth was... confusion.

"Wh-Wh-Why!? Why did my White Flame disappear!? That's the strongest flame you know!? Wh-Why... Only by snapping your finger..." (Felmenia)

"Uwahh.. You are that serious? I thought True Flame would be something dangerous, but, it's only accelerating the combustion by adding oxygen." (Suimei)

"Wh-What's with that attitude!? M-My fire!" (Felmenia)

Watching Suimei's disappointment, she couldn't say anything. Why was the flame gone? Why was he disappointed? Thinking that, she could only get frustrated.

"No curse, no meaning in the flame, it's just something that was pulled out of nowhere. That's why it's pitifully weak. If I were your teacher, I would be shouting at you to start from the basics again." (Suimei)

"Wh-What? What's wrong with my magic!?" (Felmenia)

"Everything! E-V-E-R-Y-T-H-I-N-G! You are just a normal flamethrower!" (Suimei)

"Wh-What!?" (Felmenia)

"God... I don't care anymore..." (Suimei)

Suimei gave up explaining. His amazed eyes turned into eyes of pity. She was irritated that he broke her magic. What did he do? What happened?

When he sighed again, suddenly at his feet...

A magic circle appeared.

"Wh-What!?" (Felmenia)

"What now?" (Suimei)

Suimei was tired of her. But, now, she seemed to be seeing something amazing. She was shocked seeing something impossible.

"A magic circle created without writing it? Impossible..." (Felmenia)

"Heh?" (Suimei)

"Heh my ass. What did you do!? Why did a magic circle suddenly appear!?" (Felmenia)

She was now yelling at him in bewilderment. But, Suimei was supposed to be the one to do that...

A magic circle is something that can appear not only on the ground, on paper, or on anything. It's something that appears on any surface when someone constructs a magic. In magic practice, it's something that helps us simplify things.

Normally, one must draw it themselves. That's why it can't be used in battle. It can only be used in ceremony. But, just now, he... Without doing anything...

"Well, isn't it normal?" (Suimei)

"Normal my ass. It will become a mess if anything interrupts the drawing process!" (Felmenia)

She yelled again. Suimei let out a troubled face.

"Seriously? Even that part? Did this world's magic die or something?" (Suimei)

Suimei was looking at her. While thinking, with his finger on his forehead, he spoke with a different tone.

"Hmm, listen, in order to make a magic circle automatically, you have to implement the system in the foundation of magic itself beforehand. If you do that, the magic circle will appear when you use magic, and you can use magic quickly. Understand?" (Suimei)

「えっと、あのな。こいつは予め決めておいた魔術の術式を構築すると、自動で魔法陣が形成されるように、前もって世界に干渉してその魔術の基盤を組み込んでおいたものだ。そうしておく、と、魔術を使うとき魔法陣が自動で発生して、高速で魔術を行使できるんだよ。分かるか？」

"Eh? Ah?" (Felmenia)

"Don't just chirp like a bird saying that it's impossible. Isn't it happening in front of you right now? If you keep shouting nonsense, and deny even this magic that is happening right now, I will not approve of you as western people. Got it?" (Suimei)

"....." (Felmenia)

She was frustrated that she couldn't respond. So, she shut up. Even though what he said seemed legit, she had never heard about a technique to make magic circles appear upon activation. There has never been anything like that even among the elders.

"It's just a simplification of magic. It's essential in battle. Is this really a fantasy world? It's like our world is more of a fantasy world than this one you know?" (Suimei)

"Th-There's a simplification of magic! The greatest example is no-chant technique!" (Felmenia)

"Eh? What's that? No-Chant is such an advanced technique?" (Suimei)

"O-Of course!" (Felmenia)

"Well, if it's a big spell, it's a different matter. Then, will this be a great trick?" (Suimei)

Suimei said that easily. He snapped his fingers. Suddenly, the air in front

of her burst greatly.

There was not even a moment to take a breath. The exploded air was blowing in four directions, causing a big shockwave.

"Wh-What!? No chant!? Furthermore, not even a word!?" (Felmenia)

"That's cool Suimei-kun! You can do it without chanting! Now, you will join the mages' ranks! Pfft... Stupid." (Suimei)

He seemed proud for a moment, then immediately depressed. He was not in the mood anymore.

But...

"I've had enough of your explanations. I have no intention to ask you anymore. That's why." (Felmenia)

Then, he chanted.

"<Archiatus Overload>!" (Suimei)



(TL Note :]

Was that the chant? Archiatus Overload? Since the chant was short, Felmenia didn't know what it does, but under his feet, a magic circle was shining brightly.

Then, a white light with rainbow sparkle appeared.

"!?" (Felmenia)

It was a tremendous magic power. It was so bright that she closed her eyes for a moment. Then, after a silence, she opened her eyes and saw a figure of someone standing there with an intimidating magic aura.

"What!? His magic power increased!? Wha-" (Felmenia)

"What now? I'm already tired listening to you. Don't say any more than that. Ah. I get it. You are surprised because of the amplification of magic power? I know, I know. I already know your question." (Suimei)

Suimei was already tired of her questions. He no longer intended to answer her, so he shot down her question right away.

He took a breath and then spoke again.

"Even though I said that we should start now, we wasted too much time. Okay then, Miss Mage, is it my turn?" (Suimei)

When he asked that, Suimei was wearing an interested expression. It looked fun.

She didn't know what just happened. Since she came here, she had thought that many times. The magic amplification too, in the end, like the boy said, he used a magic circle to activate his magic.

Since she prepared magic circles beforehand, it was still weird. It required time to draw them, and it made the time to use magic increase as well. But, the man in front of her produced a miracle. He ignored the minimum time required.

No matter if it was a lie or not, it was the reality. He used it without writing it. He did something she couldn't do or even understand. This boy was definitely invaluable. He has learned magic in a world she didn't know. He should have obtained a divine knowledge.

This boy is definitely stronger than me.

This boy is definitely stronger than the senior mages whom I studied from.

This boy is definitely stronger than Hero Reiji.

This boy is definitely stronger than the Demon Lord that will destroy the world...

"You... What are you?" (Felmenia)

“Oh, I forgot. I’ve never named myself since I came here. Okay, fine. I will specially name myself before you.”

Suimei, as if remembering something, opened his mouth again.

“I am a mage. Suimei Yakagi. My goal is to reach the truth behind all of the world’s mysteries. At the moment, Japan’s western scholar.” (Suimei)

Mage. Suimei Yakagi.

The one who brought down the strongest mage in Astel’s history to the ground. A name that she won’t ever be able to forget.

It went just as he had planned. Because Suimei lured Felmenia to the barrier, he can now demonstrate his full power as a mage.

Seeing the gap in power, Felmenia could only stand in fear and frustration. In front of her, Suimei had showed unimaginable knowledge and magic power. (彼女を前に、水明は己が持てる知識を用立て、魔力を漲らせて臨む。)

If anyone here was to witness this, they would know that this is overkill. Felmenia Stingray, no, mages in this world are too far behind in their world's magic. Then, he should go easy on them. He should reduce the useless magic power and control them. That would be efficient and gentlemanly. Yeah.

But, Suimei has no such intention. Even if he didn't know the level of magic here, didn't know the legal use of a magic circle, didn't know that chanting is essential, or make the magic pool into his body as a mage of this world would, a mage is still a mage.

He prepared the stage for the fight. Since he's the host, he must not forget the courtesy of giving his full power no matter how low the challenger's level is. If you're a mage, do it like a mage; always show your best magic to fascinate the opponent's heart and make them surrender.

Though, it's true that he prepared it for another reason, too. In the middle of a fight, as the host, he has to appear full of spirit. That's, Suimei Yakagi's pride as a mage.

After the confrontation a while ago, of course, there's no starting line for this fight, The fight had already begun a long time ago. It's now left to whoever decides to move first.

Unable to endure the fight's tension, the first one to move is Felmenia.

"Oh, fire. Become the true flame and burn away those who stray from your path. Burn away everything. Become the white catastrophe. <True

Flare>!" (Felmenia)

It's the true flame she proclaimed earlier. Even if she said it's a true flame, it's just a high temperature flame caused by magic. It seems that the previous flame was just a test. There's a huge difference in the scale. That would mean, the magic power infused into this is large.

Suddenly, the flame started swirling like a vortex. It spread a bit, and then it went at him while twisting like a tornado.

Then, Suimei's heart changed completely.

The flame is coming towards him. Even if there's no strong feeling in it anymore, of course, Suimei had no intention of staying still. He took a breath, concentrated, optimized his magic, and he cast it.

"<Secandum ex Quartum excipio>!" (Suimei)

This is a magic for defense. When he first came to this world, he already thought of using it. "A Dazzling Golden shield".

He stretched out his hand, three golden magic circles appeared and turned into a shield.

(TL Note : It did say three... in case you're wondering about the fourth wall later on.)

If it's just a hot flame, it would have no effect. The shield is firm. It won't break from something like a flame. Stopped by the triple magic circle, it can't help but disappear.

Seventh Article, White Flame, made a thunderous noise in its path, and it crashed into the golden magic shield. Upon the impact, the pure white flame scattered. The white flame is trying to pass through it, and it is making thunderous sounds and sparks. It destroyed the surroundings... 1 second. 2 seconds. 3 seconds. 4 seconds. However, the white flame couldn't go through it. It was stopped at the second magic circle. The third circle is rotating in order to configure the magic and unravel it. As a result, the dazzling white flame turned back to a red flame. At last, because of the fourth (last) circle's power, reflection, the flame is scattered in all directions. The magic circle stood there until everything

disappeared; this attack was full of rage.

(EN: I want to replace the word fourth with last. It would denote the same thing while meshing better with what was said earlier. The number of circles part)

“No! I’m not finished, yet!” (Felmenia)

A voice filled with spirit can be heard. It’s the proof of the next shot. Even though it was blocked, she accumulated the white flame again in the air. By saying “Oh, Flame!” for the second time, she shot again on her command. Once again, the white flame is coming; however, this time, attack approached from the side in order to pierce the barrier.

The flame is moving and changing direction. As expected, the Court Mage title is not for show. To change its direction, control the flame, and attack in a nimble manner, she certainly possesses first-class magic control.

However, if it doesn’t have quality, it’s meaningless no matter how skillful she is. Don’t bother trying to pass through these walls, that magic doesn’t have enough destructive power to scratch these golden walls. That said, if he let go of the barrier, the flame will catch him; even the court floor is reduced to ashes. (かといって防御を解いての遁走でも、炎は己をコンマ一秒を削って追い掛けるが、コートの上にも引っ掛からず一筋の焦げあとも残せないのだ。)

While looking at the white flame that can’t reach him, he decided that it is his turn to counter-attack. Both sides are opened for escape. That’s why, he starts to chant acceleration magic. Reducing Gravity. Reducing mass. <Nutus Mltitudo Decresco.> As he muttered those words, he’s freed from the shackles of gravity, and his body becomes light. His body is now seemly weightless.

He sprints at her. No, He flies at her.

The black coat is fluttering and cutting the incoming white flame, it’s

gliding like a swallow towards Felmenia to attack.

“Too fast.” (Felmenia)

It might be a complaint. Suddenly, he’s already so close to her that she mistakes his movement for teleportation. By the time she noticed, he’s was already three meters from her. Before she finished her sentence, he snaps his finger.

During that brief moment, he possessed eyes cold enough to startle her.

Offensive Magic. Modern mage, Suimei can make compressed air explode just by snapping his finger. Even though it’s simple, the power can be great. Because it’s simple, it’s very fast. Because it’s a physical attack, the effect is obvious.

Bachin !

Like a transparent bomb that causes a transparent explosion, the explosion blows up the ground below it. The explosion is near; however, since she saw before, she managed to evade by hair breadth.

“Guh... Argh...” (Felmenia)

As to block her escape route, he snapped his finger again. Realizing that, Felmenia desperately changed her direction. She’s trying to escape for her life from the serial explosion.

She cried shouting, “Th-This is ridiculous! How can you cast magic so effortlessly?!” (Felmenia)

“Hah.... If you can’t do it, you will lose you third-rate mage. Because the enemy has shot at me, now it’s my turn to shot? We’re not in RPG Game you know?” (Suimei)

That’s right, this is not a game; this is a test with lives at stake. The result can be decided in a split second. It’s different from Felmenia’s mystery.(フェルメニアの持つ神秘とは訳が違ふ。)

While Felmenia is tryinig to escape, he takes out a vial from his pocket.

And then, he quickly removes it’s cap.

The inside is Mercury. This unique metal is a metal that is in liquid form at normal temperatures. In the alchemic world, it's called Androgynous Monster . He has been waiting for this chance to use it.

Then, as it scatters and creates a line in the air, he says, "<Permutatio Coagulatio vis lamina>!" (Suimei)

Gripping the Mercury that is still in liquid form, he's wielding the mercury that has taken its form of a liquid blade. Of course, he chose the form of a blade; a Mercury-Katana. The material is, Mercury. It can be changed into anything by magic. It is a shape-shifting weapon.

"Oh, Earth! Build your obstinate body, and crush my enemy! <Stone Raid>!" (Felmenia)

Before Suimei finished building the shape, Felmenia finished her spell. She shot a dirt attracting bullet at him. Before reaching him, the earth bullet had already become large.

"Eat this!" (Felmenia)

"Too soft !" (Suimei)

He cut the boulder with his sword in the blink of an eye. Even if it's a bullet, it's not something that he can't cut. That's why, if it's just a rock, it's not even a threat. Suimei cut the rock with the tip of his katana that's filled with magic power. He also destroyed the rock bullet from while cutting the large mass of rock. It was elegantly cut with his sword, perfectly.

"You're a mage, yet you can use sword!?" (Felmenia)

"So what if I can use it? Close-quarter combat skill is indispensable for a mage you know? Well, whether it's close or far, it's not a problem."
(Suimei)

Gin.

"Argh, Damn damn damn damn damn !" (Felmenia)

The stone she shot out of desperation is destroyed; furthermore, not even the pebble can scratch him. There wasn't even dust on his clothes.

When he slashed the last rock bullet, the rock lost its shape and crumbled.

"Oh, Fire! Penetrate them, Burn the enemy in front of-" (Felmenia)

"Permutatio Coagulatio vis flagellum" (Suimei)

He chanted at the same time as Felmenia, but because his chant is shorter, he finished it first. A magic circle is created on the Mercury-Katana. Then, he turned his wrist and swung it as fast as he could. Then, the iron-like katana before is now changed into a whip.

Due to the chant, it became a mercury whip. To stop her chanting, he attacked her from the sides.

"Nn!?" (Felmenia)

The mercury strike, surpassing the speed of sounds, made an explosive sound similar to a fired blank. The ground is gradually destroyed. A metal whip's power can't be compared to that of a leather whip. The texture, the sharpness, the length, and he can control it all. Even if one had a ridiculously massive body, it would be shredded like a paper. She thought so.

"Ugh...That's..Impossible.." (Felmenia)

He can take a life with one swing. Facing that truth, Felmenia can't even move a finger. Usually, she will move while chanting, but her mouth is the same. She can't even move her mouth. She's mortified and can only let out a mortified voice.

Her face became pale. Is this the end? No, as long as she's not on her knees, it's not the end. Even if she's mortified, it doesn't mean she has given up. "I'm standing in front of a predicament." verses "Where is the recovery room?" It looks like she hasn't started to think like that. I have to make her unable to defy me, for the second time, from the bottom of her

heart.

Then, his magic pool is like burning inside, suddenly, his magic power exploded.

Guon!

He possess a power so strong, that even the castle shook in his presence. His magic power, a power that had nowhere to go, intertwined in the space around him creating blue lighting. It's like a dragon's roar.

Then, He turned to Felmenia in front of him. She has lost herself due to fear, and she is awed by the difference in power; dumbfounded even.

Then, Suimei chanted.

"<Velam nox lacrima potestas>" (Suimei)

Under his feet, a huge magic circle expanded through the garden. A thick blue light that even surpasses the brightness of the stars appears before him. It's still so dazzling and strong even in this fantasy world.

"<Olympus quod terra misceo misucui mixtum>" (Suimei)

Every time a phenomenon ended, another is created. After the chant, a phenomenon is created; Chanted for, one by one. Different from this world's magic, his magic's incantation itself is power. Even while chanting, the world changes, the situation became where miracle is continuously created. Golden particles rise from the ground, floating to heaven and absorbed by the sky. Then, as if mimicking the stars, countless magic circles appeared in mid-air.

"<Dezzmoror pluvaiincessanter>" (Suimei)

When she noticed that the air had already filled with countless magic circles. It's filled with multiple type of wide area spell. The attribute is imitated after Ether. It's derived from the numerous secret arts from Kaballah, and he then made it compatible with Astrology. It's modern complex magic. (気が付けば、空を彩る星のように天球を埋める魔法陣。種類

は多重広域展開型。属性はエーテルと準える空属性。系統はカバラ数秘術及びアストロロジーを両立させた、現代魔術の代名詞とも言える他系統複合魔術。)

Suimei grinned, and he delivered the finishing blow with a smile on his face.

“Court mage-dono, do your best to hold out. Ok?” (Suimei)

Felmenia can't refute those words, she can only daringly put up her defense magic.

Then..

“<Enth astrarle>” (Suimei)

The finishing blow is delivered. Upon that word, light emitted is from the magic circles. The magic power and stars light mixes with one another to create a sky filled with dazzling lights in a multi directional manner. Just like a falling star, a teardrop falls from the sky with a thunderous roar. It silenced all other noise and destroyed all within its range.

This is magic of starry sky, Falling Star. Befitting of the term Ens Astral(エンスアストラレ), this is one of Suimei Yakagi's biggest spells. Not long after the falling star took place, what left is the original White Garden. It's like all the destruction until now was a dream. There was Suimei Yakagi with his black suit and Felmenia with her tattered white robe.

He proceeded to Felmenia who was unable to move, and put his sword to her neck.

“It's my win, is there any problem with that?” (Suimei)

When asked about the result, she said with trembling voice.

“Yo-You Monster.. That kind of power! Who said that you can't fight? Why you reject to slay the demon lord? If you go, even the Demon Lord...” (Felmenia)

“Can be defeated? That's stupid. The numbers are not a joke. The history is the proof. No matter how strong you are, you can't win against the overwhelming number. There's no need to try. No matter how good

the fighter is, it's nothing against the numerous. I'm just one human."
(Suimei)

Feeling as though he hasn't said enough, Suimei opened his mouth again.

"If I listen to your request, the one that I have to fight is not only the demon lord Nakushathra or something (ナクシャトラ). There's his subordinate army of demons too. That Barcodohage (バーコードハゲ) already destroyed country Noshast (ノーシアス) using one million troops; however, if we think about it, what if they gathered their forces? Two times larger? Three times? It's already stupid to tell me to face those one million troops. Even if you select your few best, there's no chance to win against that unusual number you know? Whatever I do, there's no why I can win, damn it." (Suimei)

"What are you talking about? War is a battle of personal power. If you have that much power, you can't be defeated!" (Felmenia)

"Are you idiot? I'm saying that quality and quantity is different. Quality isn't any guarantee to win against quantity." (Suimei)

"A mage li-....A mage as powerful as you bastard, you still say that?"
(Felmenia)

"Hah ? Me ? I'm not a first class mage. Well, I have a bit of talent, but, in my world I'm at best only average. That's right.. If it's the top's top, he might be able to laugh this off. But, that's doesn't matter here." (Suimei)

"....." (Felmenia)

Now, it's Felmenia's turn to lose words. Whether it's because of Suimei's abnormally terrifying world, or if it's because of Suimei exaggerated things, it's certain that she's unable to say a thing because of the overwhelming difference.

"Well, I already knew it from the start. This world's magic is far too left behind. Honestly, our fight wasn't even that fun. Or, maybe that's just because of your harsh remarks." (Suimei)

That's right, right now Suimei is saying his honest feelings. His delight is

of seeing new mystery; a fight with another mage, for him, is a way to see unknown magic. To figure out that magic is the purpose of the battle. However, in this fight, there wasn't even a single bit of magic worth looking at.

Unexpected, surprised, and easy destruction. "A fight beyond understanding", that's why he won; of course, he felt no delight in it.

As it was already bound to happen, he forced the results upon Felmenia.

"Well then, now. Let's put an end to our play, magician." (Suimei)

She felt cold upon hearing it. He changed his tone; it was as if his heart suddenly went cold. Felmenia couldn't even stand up. She couldn't do anything about it. It was as if she will meet her end, alone. She became pale.

"Ar-Are you going to kill me?" (Felmenia)

"Hmm, that's right.. How do you think I will end this?" (Suimei)

"Pl-Please ! Do anything but that!" (Felmenia)

Felmenia discarded her pride and prostrated to Suimei. Help me. Overlook me. She swore not to go against him, but his appearance didn't change.

But, Suimei snorted and with evil intention, saying..

"Oh my, oh my! you came at me with the intention to kill, but you are pleading for your life?" (Suimei)

"N-No ! I have no intention to kill you from the start! I just wanted to correct you..." (Felmenia)

Felmenia shook her head violently. He stared at her with no interest and doubting eyes. In a fight with lives at stake, it's not a reason to plead. He already prepared for this. He intends to destroy the opponent and at worst get destroyed instead; however, he never considered that this unsightly view is the price she would pay.

(命を懸けて場に臨んだ訳ではないにしろ、これでは覚悟がなさすぎた。相手をぶち

のめす気概はあるが相手にぶちのめされる最悪は考えなかったがゆえ、この不様はその代償だろう。)

I have heard about story of noble princesses. For better or worse, her personality might get affected.

Then, Suimei asked the true meaning of the statement from before.

"Is it true that you had no intention to kill me?" (Suimei)

"It's true! I swear to Goddess Alshuna, it's not a lie!" (Felmenia)

"Though I don't know the weight of your goddess's name, as a person from other world, a Japanese, I'm not going to get involved. " (Suimei)

With a clink, the flangeless katana made a sound that a katana with a flange would. (Flange is the katana's guard that separates the blade and the hold.) Felmenia, who is not Japanese, doesn't know what he's talking about, but she can feel instinctively that her life is getting shorter; her attempt at getting Suimei to spare her life became a pathetic appeal.

"Please! I beg you! I don't want to die yet! I don't want to die.. Please.. I beg you..." (Felmenia)

It looks like he bullied her too much. If she already faltered this much, it's probably fine to enter the real thing. Suimei thought that, and he then stopped his bullying act.

He said, as if bored, "Then, as exchange of letting you live, I have terms you must follow." (Suimei)

"T-Terms?" (Felmenia)

"Yeah, first, don't ever tell anyone about what happened today. Second, don't ever tell anyone about my identity as mage. Especially to Reiji and Mizuki. Got it?" (Suimei)

He gave a sharp look. But, Felmenia shook her head with all of her might.

"W-Wait. I haven't told anything to Reiji-dono or Mizuki-dono, but the king already knows. Th-Then.." (Felmenia)

"Heh..That's surprising. An overconfident person like you told someone else? That's surprising. I thought you would have kept it to yourself since you thought you would definitely win. Well, I don't mind that much. After all, you won't be able to speak of the details now." (Suimei)

Since she already avoided the danger from the first term, Felmenia relieved. Seeing this, Suimei stated the last and most important term.

"And third, you will have to sign this document." (Suimei)

Suimei made a gesture as if drawing something from void; a paper with a pen appeared. He always brings his pen and paper. There's a list written in a foreign language.

Of course, Felmenia doesn't understand what is written there.

"Wh-What is this?" (Felmenia)

"What, it's just a contract. So that you won't go against the terms I stated before. You can do this much right?" (Suimei)

"I-I understand, I'll sign it." (Felmenia)

Felmenia is a bit suspicious but agreed. Even if she doesn't understand clearly, she has no choice anyway.

After she finished signing, she stamped it with her blood. Since Suimei watched until the end, he said it plainly.

"Ah, I forgot to tell you, if you break it, you'll die." (Suimei)

"Wh-What !?" (Felmenia)

"Yup. If you intend to explain the majority of things that happened here tonight to the king, I want you to know that that is not allowed. I don't want things to get any more complicated than this already has." (Suimei)

"Wait. There's no way that's possible-" (Felmenia)

"There's nothing impossible for a mage." (Suimei)

As expected, this wasn't out of scorn for her, though. To felmenia, that ask this dubiously, this is the most effective answer. Suimei let go of his mercury-katana and use his finger that is filled with magic power to poke

the contract. Suddenly, Felmenia can feel something gripping her heart.

"That's Stup-, Gu, Guahhh!" (Felmenia)

"By the way, it's just like this. You can feel the force gripping your heart right?" (Suimei)

He removed his finger from the contract. Felmenia was released from the grip, and she was faintly breathing. Then, she complained faintly.

"Gu.Ha.. I-I never heard of something like that, before." (Felmenia)

"Even if you know, you have no choice anyway. What? It's not that hard. I just don't want you to tell anyone about me. It's more honest than the folklore of defeating demon lord right?" (Suimei)

"a..u..u..." (Felmenia)

She didn't respond, and she hung her head in defeat.

(Ara.. Did I overdid it?) (Suimei)

Looks like, she's spectacularly broken. Felmenia have tears in her eyes; she was dumbfounded and sobbing.

Shown this much, even the culprit, Suimei Yakagi, couldn't help but to show mercy.

Let's end this huh? As expected, he's not that cruel. He's impatiently says to Felmenia.

"We-Well. That's why I want you to be sure to protect your promise, ok? Even me, I don't want to kill pointlessly; it would make me feel bad." (Suimei)

Somehow, it's a bit softer than before. Is it because of sympathy? Felmenia's still sobbing; it's unknown whether she listened or not. It's a bit different from his prediction, he's scratching his head. Then, he decided that he probably won't do anything more than this. He left the White Garden.

Even though he finished this, this wasn't exactly what he imagined would happen.

A fight between mages is by no means a life and death fight. Actually, it's rare for a mage to take another mage's life. It's true that he won't forgive someone that entered his workshop without his permissions; however, other than that, everyone respected each other. A brotherhood that must take each other's hand.

Recently, Magic is paused by science. A brake is applied to non-stop development. That's why, those who pursue magic, even then, is valuable. That's why, in order to preserve magic, there's a rule preventing one from killing another mage even if the magic lineage is different. For that reason, that contract from back then is often used. For sparing their life, they must not be able to do any harm more than this. This way, the mage can still live, and magic users won't go extinct.

Though, he omit some exception, therefore a mage fight is not something to take each other's life, but to compete with each other. In short, precision, power, and technique's complexity, the class of magic, theory, special characteristic, it is a fight to make them accept each other.

Then, what about this fight? There's no exceptional magic, so there's no need to dwell in victory.

That's why; he can only feel like this.

"Really, they are so far behind.." (Suimei)

At the words he told Felmenia before, he's now worried. From now on, he would have to live here. He wondered if there's any mystery that can make him excited.

A few days after the events in White Garden, Felmenia Stingray was summoned to the audience chamber by King Almadius. The reason was, of course, to hear about Hero Reiji's progress in learning magic. He wanted to hear it from the teacher herself.

The king heard about it from other people as well, but the details were like "Mass of Talent", "Magic Genius", "World's Best", and other such vague descriptions. The details were not clear. It might be that he's strong beyond comprehension. Anyway, as the person who sent him, he had the responsibility to know the details.

He wanted the hero's teacher, Felmenia, to report. Felmenia, wearing a white robe and kneeling before him, was going to evaluate Hero Reiji and Mizuki Anou.

In short, Hero Reiji's talent was extraordinary. His magic power alone was 10 times stronger than the Court Mage's. There were still a few problems with his control and technique, but she thought that his comprehension speed when learning magic was weird. About Mizuki Anou, even though she didn't have that much power compared to Hero Reiji, she had a similar ability. Regarding her ability to comprehend and express magic, she was probably on par with the Hero without the Hero's Blessing.

"That's all. I'm impressed by Hero Reiji's and Mizuki Anou's progress. They will someday be on par with other countries' top mages as well."
(Felmenia)

Lastly, to finish Felmenia's compliment, the king asked a joke.

"Will they surpass you?" (King)

"If it's Reiji-dono, maybe." (Felmenia)

"Is that so. I'm relieved. If Reiji-dono's talent is that great, then I have no worries." (King)

"Yes. I'm surprised as well. It's only been two weeks since he first experienced magic, and he's already on par with an intermediate level mage. 'Hero that is chosen by the world' is not just a title. As a mage myself, I must say I'm jealous." (Felmenia)

Said Felmenia silently. She dropped her face a bit. Even though she didn't express it clearly, since she spoke honestly about being envious, it was shown on the surface a bit. Not surprising. According to what she said, Hero Reiji's growth couldn't be put into words anymore. To have made Felmenia, who was known as a genius, say such words, it was probably cruel.

"That might be so, but if he doesn't have at least that much power..." (King)

"I agree with Your Highness, the demon lord wouldn't be defeatable." (Felmenia)

"Fumu." (King)

The king nodded in agreement. Having heard the hero's progress, he wanted to give thanks to Felmenia who had helped him until now.

"Mage, Felmenia Stingray, I have heard the circumstances. Three days until Hero Reiji's departure. Until then, give it your best." (King)

"As you wish. Then, I will be leaving..." (Felmenia)

After Felmenia paid her respects, she tried to leave...

But, she couldn't hear agreement from the king. Instead, the king opened his mouth as if there was still something else...

"Felmenia, there's someone else I want to ask you about, is it fine?" (King)

"Y-Yes." (Felmenia)

"About that boy, Reiji-dono's friend, Suimei-dono." (King)

There, the king mentioned Suimei's name.

That's right, other than Felmenia's report; the king was also interested in Suimei. He also used magic inside of castle while strolling. But, the king feared Felmenia and Suimei's confrontation the most. It had been a few days since that conversation. He wanted to ask whether anything had happened...

"Su-Suimei-dono?" (Felmenia)

As if not expecting such question, Felmenia panicked a bit. Though she didn't intend to let out such a small voice, the king asked her.

"That's right. Back then, you told me that the boy was moving right? You always kept observing him right?" (King)

"Th-That's..." (Felmenia)

"Felmenia?" (King)

But, somehow, Felmenia tried to avoid the king's gaze and couldn't speak clearly. It was different from the talk about the hero, the king couldn't understand.

Anyway, the situation was weird. She would always respond coldly. No matter the situation or the enemy, she would always be calm. She would look to meet the enemy. But now, there was nothing like that.

"Ah...Uh..." (Felmenia)

"What's wrong ? Don't tell me, something happened?" (King)

"N-No, It's just that..." (Felmenia)

Even though the king asked twice, she acted like she was holding something and said weird things. When he realized, she was sweating. Now, he asked seriously.

"Answer me, Felmenia. If you stay silent, the conversation won't go anywhere, you know? Tell me what happened and what you saw." (King)

But, instead of answering, she lowered her head.

"Y-Your Highness! Please, somehow, forgive me, anything but that!"
(Felmenia)

"Are you saying that you can't speak of it?" (King)

"Yes... Unfortunately, as Your Highness said..." (Felmenia)

"Why?" (King)

"That too, I can't speak of it, I beg for forgiveness." (Felmenia)

"Mu..." (King)

Upon seeing that persistent attitude, he could only groan.

Felmenia declined while prostrating. She had never been like this. But, why was she hiding it to that extent? No, it's why now? Before now, if something happened, she wouldn't like talking about it. If she spoke something bad, there would be a punishment. She probably thought so.

That meant, it was her self-defense from punishment. Then, everything was clear.

"I already told you not to do anything, Felmenia. But, it seems you did something to him, am I wrong?" (King)

When asked with a stronger tone, Felmenia became like a small animal, trembling and scared. The wise Felmenia was ashamed that she didn't expect this to happen. But, no matter how scared she was, a punishment

is a punishment. First, grasp the situation, then, if she explained, it would be alright...

Then...

"Speak. I can't give the proper punishment if you don't speak." (King)

"P-Please Your Highness, I-I beg for forgiveness." (Felmenia)

"There's no need to be that obstinate. I already expect things that can even endanger my life. Speak all of it." (King)

"Y-Your Highness..." (Felmenia)

"It's heavy, you know? Felmenia?" (King)

When he realized, she was frozen like for eternity, and tears welled up in her eyes. He wondered, when was the last time he saw her crying? When she entered an evening party for the first time, she got lost. She was separated from her father, Count Stingray, and her mother. She was confused and didn't know where to go. That was probably the last time.

This was weird. It was like he was extorting something from her.

"...Why can't you talk?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

Felmenia didn't answer, she only hang her head down.

King Almadius was thinking about why she refused to talk.

Since he didn't receive an answer, he decided to change the question...

"Felmenia. I will ask you a question now." (King)

"But, Your Highness..." (Felmenia)

"Listen, Felmenia. If the answer is "correct", stay silent. If the answer is "wrong", shake your head. Understand?" (King)

She could only stay silent...

Then, the king asked her one by one.

"In the last few days, did something happen with Suimei-dono?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

Silence... Bullseye. But, it was still within his predictions.

"Was it a conversation?" (King)

This time, Felmenia shook her head.

"Was it using force?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

Right on the mark. If it was using force, the punishment would have been coercion with magic.

Felmenia should have known. But, I might be wrong.

"Did you hurt Suimei-dono?" (King)

But, she shook her head.

"Wait. Did you try to hurt him?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

Felmenia stayed silent. Now this is surprising. According to her, she used force. She must have taunted him, but, even though she's the country's best mage, she couldn't even hurt him. What does that mean...

King decided to ask her again.

"Did you lose?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

There was only silence. It's certain now. Felmenia faced Suimei alone, and the result was that she was miserably defeated.

"Then, at that time, somehow you had your weakness held by Suimei-dono, and as a result, you can't speak now?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

Right on the mark... So, she couldn't speak because of her weakness. Even though the person who held it is not here, she still abided by the contract. But, Felmenia and Suimei are both beings that reside in Magic's

Abyss realm. For me who only has limited knowledge, it's hard to guess the contract.

"Y-Your Highness. I'm sorry. Not only to break your order, I have shown disloyalty. This Felmenia will accept any kind of punishment." (Felmenia)

"It's fine. You already received your punishment from Suimei-dono. I won't punish you anymore." (King)

"Y-Your Highness..." (Felmenia)

Regretting her mistakes, Felmenia was extremely discouraged. The fight with Suimei had left a very big impact on her.

If so, she no longer needed to be punished. Being like this, her pride would have vanished already. I have one less thing to worry about. But, I can't afford to be at ease. In return, I received another thing to worry about.

"Felmenia. I can't afford to overlook this. I'm thinking of summoning Suimei-dono here." (King)

"Your Highness, to summon Suimei-dono, what for..." (Felmenia)

Felmenia was extremely embarrassed, the answer was obvious.

"Isn't it obvious? I will ask things that I can't hear from you. Whether it's about the summoning room or your weakness, I can't overlook this discord." (King)

"I-It must not be done! You can't—A-a-Argh!!!" (Felmenia)

Suddenly, she held her chest and started screaming.

"Felmenia!? What happened!? Felmenia!?" (King)

The king stood at the throne watching this unusual event. Not only was her suffering unusual, she writhed on the floor and cried. Thankfully, it didn't last long, and then she bowed her head again.

"Ah... Ah... I'm sorry... for showing... such disgraceful..." (Felmenia)

"What just happened? Is it illness?" (King)

"No..." (Felmenia)

She denied it. But, it certainly was something. She sweated and curled up in a ball, her face was pale like a dead man's. Of course, I would have thought that it was an illness. But, I've never heard that she had an illness before. I reevaluate the situation. Her chest hurt. It was probably her heart. It was in the middle of conversation. When she objected, and talked about Suimei.

That would mean...

"Can it be, your weakness?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

"Magic?" (King)

"....." (Felmenia)

Felmenia didn't answer. No, she couldn't answer because of it. From her distorted face, it could be seen that she was full of regret, condemning her own foolishness.

It seems I can't ask anymore.

So, I say...

"I understand. Felmenia. Leave everything it to me." (King)

"Your Highness?" (Felmenia)

"Just like I said before, I will summon Suimei-dono." (King)

"B-But!" (Felmenia)

"It's fine. I will take all the blame. You-" (King)

After that, King Almadius dispatched a messenger to the mage who placed the curse.

After the conversation with Felmenia, it was already late. In the audience chamber, the king heard the sound of the door opening.

The one who entered was Suimei Yakagi, Hero Reiji's friend and the mage from the other world that Felmenia spoke about.

The boy looked normal at first sight. He saluted in front of the door. Then, he headed in my direction.

There was nothing different from his first visit here, but now he was wearing different clothes. The clothing was black, but it felt like it had been refined and looked like an artifact. That was what the king felt.

It might have been because he was unfamiliar with it, but for some reason he kneeled awkwardly.

"Just like the messenger asked, I came." (Suimei)

"It's late at night, because this was not planned. Before I thank you for coming here, I inform you that today, it is only the two of us. I want you to be at ease. " (King)

"....." (Suimei)

"Is that okay?" (King)

"Yes..." (Suimei)

When asked, after a little while, Suimei showed his consent and lifted his face.

Though, his expression was still the same.

Observing him, the king didn't get to the point right away, rather, he asked about Suimei's appearance.

"Suimei-dono, do you like that clothing? I've never seen it before though..." (King)

"Yes. This is clothing I brought from the other world. I kept it in my bag until recently. I only brought a few things here with me." (Suimei)

"Different from the Hero's clothing, it's got a different vibe." (King)

"This is a type of clothing treated as a uniform back there. It was considered to be the ideal shape there." (Suimei)

Hearing Suimei-dono's words, he took another glance at his clothing. There was not even a wrinkle on the black clothing. It hung from his neck. He wore a white shirt on the inside. The combination projected an indescribable aura.

"Fumu, it matches you really well." (King)

"Thank you very much." (Suimei)

When Suimei said that, while still kneeling, for some reason he corrected his collar and fixed his sleeves and posture. Upon seeing his actions, the king felt the previous awkwardness disappear momentarily. Suddenly, Suimei lowered his head.

"While it is late, I'm sorry for showing such an ugly display back then."
(Suimei)

That's right; it's an apology for the day of the summoning. Back then, Suimei said lots of things. Of course, that was a natural reaction.

When he heard about the situation he immediately stood up and said, "Don't fuck with me, impossible? If you can't return us, don't call us!" It was painful to hear those words.

And even though the crowd was enraged by his insolent behavior, the situation was just as he described. Even though I defused the situation back then, I never thought that I would receive an apology from him.

"Ah, it's fine. I understand your feelings. We summoned you without your consent, and we cannot return you. There's no need to apologize. Please raise your head." (King)

"Then..." (Suimei)

When the king stated that he was not at fault, Suimei raised his head again. From his expression, he was probably wondering who was at fault back then. He looked a bit embarrassed.

After that, Suimei shifted the conversation.

"About that private conversation....." (Suimei)

"Fumu, There's something I have to hear no matter what from Suimei-dono." (King)

"Yes..." (Suimei)

A troubled voice could be heard. He wore a troubled expression. As expected, this was the real thing.

"I have something to ask about Felmenia from Suimei-dono." (King)

"Felmenia... Huh... I think she's the one that teaches magic to Reiji and Mizuki, did something happen?" (Suimei)

"Nope. A while ago, she said that she saw you leave your room and take a stroll in the castle." (King)

When he heard that, he could only put forth a bitter smile.

"Ah, ha... ha... ha..... Since I'm free to look around the castle, I took some

time for recreation. Is there anything wrong?" (Suimei)

"Fumu, there's no problem about that. It was my order. Of course I won't punish you or anything." (King)

"Then...What?" (Suimei)

"Hmm, let's see..." (King)

"...?" (Suimei)

On Suimei's face, confusion could be seen. That confusion is not his real reaction. I brought up Felmenia's name. Even so, he didn't tell me anything. When he realized the meaning of the question, he pretended to be innocent.

Now that I think about it, it was the same when he got summoned. When summoned, he should have at least been worried. If I were Suimei, I would probably have at least prepared that much. To be specific, threatening others with power. There's no mage that can defeat Felmenia here. Easy, right?

But, he probably wouldn't go that far, he's implying that it can be settled peacefully.

I know the dangers. But even so, I have to do this.

"You. What did you do to Felmenia?" (King)

"What did I...? I'm not sure I understand." (Suimei)

"Suimei-dono, there's no way you don't know, right? After all..." (King)

"While I'm being impolite, are you sure it's okay to continue?" (Suimei)

When I started talking, Suimei, as if blocking out my words, used a sharp tone that was completely different from before, overflowing with admonition.

At his warning, the king gulped. But...

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"Suimei-dono, I want to ask you.." (King)

After the warning, Suimei stopped kneeling, he slowly stands up.

Then, he put his hands on his back, and waving. A coat came up out of nowhere.

Though the King doesn't know what he did, when he thinks about it, it's probably Suimei's magic. It's probably a magic that our magician here know nothing of.

Then, there's nothing left of his previous expression. The gentle expression has changed completely to a sharp gaze. There's no trace of the pride of a magician that he often see.

If this is the normal situation, people would see it as disrespect behavior. But now, there's not a single person who can voice that.

It's the first time he saw such magician. Then, Suimei said while controlling his breath.

"Geez, even though there's no trace of me kicking her butt, you know that much." (Suimei)

"As expected, it's true." (King)

"Yeah. it is true. When I got summoned here, I thought that woman would noticed. That's why I look for the chance to silence her. But, That

woman can't speak of it now, How did Your Highness knows ?" (Suimei)

"I asked her, if she can't speak, silence is enough." (King)

It was simple. Suimei let out a small voice as if understanding it, then say.

"I see. I never thought of that. Certainly, according to the contract, it's fine as long as she didn't speak." (Suimei)

He speaks as if remembering something, then he gives a sharp glance again.

"But, why did you summoned me here ? I'm the one who hold her life. If you understand that, You should have known that it's dangerous to call me here when you can't even call a guard." (Suimei)

That's right, I understand. The danger of this summoning. Though I know it's dangers, I called him without any counter-measure. His question is an obvious one. But, I have a reason too.

"Certainly, it's dangerous. But, Suimei-dono is the same as the Hero, someone whom I summoned to this land. That fact won't change, the fault lies in me. Please don't say that the world force this upon you."
(King)

That's right. That's why he can't show hostility. Because he's like a beast that put kindness as a skin. That's just too selfish.

"....." (Suimei)

"Suimei-dono, I summoned you, to a place like this. I overlooked my subordinates mistakes. Furthermore, I asked an unreasonable request. "
(King)

"Why ? Why do you want to hear it that much ? If you don't hear it, Your Highness won't have to be like this." (Suimei)

"That might be so, But, I pretended her mistakes didn't exist, if she somehow killed you, I won't be able to apologize." (King)

"Even if it's for that self-conceited woman ?" (Suimei)

"That's right. She's still my retainer. That's why i have to." (King)

Hearing that, Suimei collects his breath once again, then answer.

"If she stayed silent, it wouldn't be a problem. That's absolute. Then, this conversation is over right."(Suimei)

"No. There's still more." (King)

"Though, I think there's nothing more to talk about ?" (Suimei)

He put a dubious face. But, that was not the case. Even if it's over, there's still something that he should ask.

"Suimei-dono, I know nothing about that. As the person who I summoned, I have to ask you about it. What are you ? What will you do from now on ? Frankly, I want to talk about that. If it's possible, don't be reserved." (King)

That's right. That was my true feeling.

Certainly, this conversation too, would be over if me or Felmenia stayed silent. The only one who knows about Suimei is only me and her. Then, it would turn back to normal like nothing happened. I called the Hero from another world, and tasked him to defeat the Demon Lord.

But, if so, it would be irresponsible. There has been inconvenience because of it, If I leave it just like that, even if the person himself has the power to reject it, isn't it too selfish ? I had to know what he wants to do from now on, now that lots of things have happened.

But.....

"Of course, I won't ask the impossible. This is another selfish request of mine. If you're alright with it. That's it. Please, somehow.." (King)

The King bowed his head while sitting in the throne. Though, it's not something a King should do, in order not to lose his pride, He did it.

After he raised his head again after a while, Suimei had a surprised look. Why did he do that ? He's surprised why he's going that far.

Then, Suimei sighed as if giving up.

"No. I want to apologize for my insolent behavior before. Please, the thing Your Highness wants to hear about, let me answer it to the extent of

it can be publicized." (Suimei)

Not kneeling, surely everyone will say that it's impolite. But, even so, the prideful atmosphere from before, has disappeared since a while ago. His tone also changed. This is probably his true self. Not the usual him when with Hero Reiji, Not the pride of facing an enemy he has a while ago, as a magician, Suimei Yakagi.

And that, is the biggest gift he can offer.

The King asked him.

"What are you ?" (King)

"I'm called as a mage in the previous world, a scholar that propose to pursue mystery. In short, I'm what you called Magician here." (Suimei)

"A Mage.."

When he heard that, the King involuntarily muttered that. That's something he heard for the first time. It really sounds new. If what he's saying is true, it's something like an origin. A being different from a magician...., I certainly heard about it just now.

Then, he asked...

"You, Why are you hiding it ? Aside from us, even to the Hero-dono and Mizuki-dono ?" (King)

"The other world has developed something called Science, you might have heard it from Reiji, but, on that world, Magic is driven away instead. Mages has been targeted ever since. That's why, we didn't exist on the surface.If we were to come out to the surface,we will get destroyed because we didn't abide by the world's rule.That's the reason we didn't name ourselves mages in the open." (Suimei)

Said Suimei,also,

"That's also the reason I was concealing it earlier too, I was being cautious."

added Suimei.

"Then, Hero-dono and Mizuki-dono didn't know. When Felmenia noticed it too ?" (King)

"Yes.That time, I didn't have the belief that she didn't noticed it clearly. Did she knew ? If she knew, what should I do to silence her ? It turned out to be such situation. Then, I took measure to spread the bait. It turned out that she put an dangerous automaton there. Well, I was thinking whether it could respond." (Suimei)

At that line, there's something interesting.

"Automaton ?" (King)

"Yes. With a shape of heavy cavalry, it was a fine product. Because I was attacked, I destroyed it's magic circle." (Suimei)

"Mage Sulamas's Golem, huh.." (King)

I remembered something about the golem Suimei attacked. In the castle, there's nothing but the Golem Sulamas created. Of course, the rumor that it can move was only something written on his book.

Sulamas's golem is exceptionally strong. To bring that in order to stop Suimei, I can feel Felmenia's stubbornness.

But,

"But, even though I heard that from Felmenia before, ain't it too hasty to use force ?" (King)

As expected, I think it wasn't a rational choice for the fight it. There should be room for other options.

Though it was because of Felmenia's order, I can't say it.

Then, Suimei wore a very serious face.

"I won't deny that I'm somewhat just go along with the mood. But, I am also pursue the path of Magic. Mage has it's own way of doing things, simply-no, it's to destroy those who think too highly of themselves. I also don't want to commit murder for revenge. Well, it's probably me venting my anger because I got forcibly summoned here." (Suimei)

Lastly, seeing Suimei's smile, the King can only sigh.

"Evil brat huh.." (King)

"It often happen in the midst of mage's life right ? I'm just a selfish being that only interested on what I aim. I don't think of the circumstances. Also, I don't think Your Highness which have overlooked things before, has any right to complain though ?" (Suimei)

"It's certainly so..." (King)

That's right. I was too soft and overlooked Felmenia. I don't have a strong position to say that to Suimei-dono. Looking at the result, his action can be called rational. Using it without control can also be called a bad thing. I would be free if I can accept that it's my greed. Even so, I only stayed in my room as to not trouble anyone. I have examined it too, Repository, Office, Treasury, there's no meaningful change there. (調べさせた時も、宝物殿、執務室、金庫などに保管された重大な物には一切変動がなかった。)

Also, in regard of Felmenia's crime, I can pity him for that. I don't know how it was on the other world, but, the one who instigated that type of golem here, is someone we can't complaint to even if we're killed. (あのタイプのゴーレムをけしかけたのはこちらでは殺されても文句は言えない手の出し方だ。)

Then, Suimei slowly face the side pillar. Don't tell me...

Then,

"That's the reason, it was just my venting, you should relax a bit too. I have no intention to order you anymore than this." (Suimei)

He's not saying that to me, no, no need to wonder. The one suimei talked to is Felmenia. She certainly is in the pillar's shadow.

"....." (Felmenia)

Felmenia is shocked and slowly come out from the pillar's shadow.

But, Suimei looked as it's not even funny, after looked at her once, he turned back again.

The King asked Suimei.

"When did you notice it ?" (King)

"I want to ask first, why do you think I won't notice it ?" (Suimei)

"....." (King)

That is certainly so, Suimei is a magician. Rather than the premise that he won't notice, I should have expected that he will noticed it.

But,

Translator Changed to

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Chapter 10: As A Magician...

In the dead of night, at the conclusion of his conversation with Felmenia, the King heard the door to his audience room swing open.

The one entering was Yakagi Suimei, the friend of the Hero and the one Felmenia had explained to be a mage from another world.

This ordinary-looking boy from another world bowed at the entrance, and then slowly approached.

Although the impression he gave off was identical to the one he'd felt from Suimei when they'd first met in this same room, he was now attired in clothing that the King had never seen before. This clothing was uniformly pitch black, and elegantly designed: clearly of the highest quality.

Visibly unaccustomed to such situations, Suimei's posture was a bit stiff as he kneeled before the King.

"As summoned, I have come before you, Your Majesty."

"Thank you for answering my summons despite the late hour. Your formality in presenting yourself is appreciated, but tonight, it's just the two of us. There's no need to be so formal. Please relax."

" ... "

"Is that unacceptable?"

"...I understand."

Surprised at the request, Suimei hesitated for a moment heeding the plea and raising his head.

His expression, however, was still somewhat stiff.

At this, the King opted not to jump right into the main topic, but instead asked about his clothing.

"Suimei-dono, what is this clothing you have on? You don't wear this normally."

"That is correct. This is something I've brought with me from our world. Originally, it was something I kept in my bag, one of the very few items I have with me."

"The style seems rather different from Hero-dono's."

"In our world, it's considered formal wear, and is worn on occasions such as this."

His words caused the King to again consider the clothing Suimei now wore. The jet black material was entirely uncreased and the inner lace lining ran to the neck. The stark contrast drawn by the two reinforced the feeling of an elegant design.

"Hmm. It fits you rather well."

"Thank you for your praise, Your Majesty."

As Suimei replied, he adjusted his collar and sleeves without shifting his posture. This action brought with it a familiarity that erased his former stiffness. Suddenly, as if remembering something of importance, he bowed his head.

"Although this comes rather late, but please allow me to apologize for my rudeness these last few days."

A truly respectful apology.

—Suimei was apologizing for his behavior after their summoning. On that day, having learned that they had no way of returning home, he'd become quite agitated. That said, such a response was only natural given the circumstances.

On that occasion, Suimei had leapt to his feet and yelled, "Are you kidding me? If you can't send us back, then don't bother summoning us in the first place!" and things of that nature. Indeed, they had been words that had truly hurt the King.

Suimei's provocative attitude had angered the surrounding people. The King, attempting to mediate, had ordered them to settle down, never expecting that Suimei would later come and apologize.

"Oh, no, that's unnecessary. No harm done. Your feelings at the time were only natural. We had one-sidedly pulled you into our world only to inform you that we have no way of sending you home. There is no need for you to apologize; please raise your head."

"Understood. Then..."

The King's honest words prompted Suimei to lift his head once more. From his expression, it was clear that he felt it wasn't a matter of who was to blame; either way, he felt the commotion caused by his actions had been inappropriate. This was apparent from the awkward look on his face.

With this, the preamble to their conversation had ended.

Suimei spoke next, "Might I ask what you called me here to speak about...?"

"Yes. There are things that I wish to ask you."

"...I understand."

Suimei's acknowledgment revealed his confusion, and his slightly pale face was colored with puzzlement. Considering for a moment whether the look Suimei showed now were his true thoughts revealing themselves, the King followed up with a question.

"There are a few things I wish to ask you regarding Felmenia."

"Felmenia-san...? If I remember correctly, she's the one who's been teaching Reiji and Mizuki magic? What about her?"

"That is the one. She mentioned to me that she'd seen you wander around the palace a few days ago."

Faced with Suimei's pretense at having only a superficial knowledge of who Felmenia was, the King brought up what he had heard from her.

Those words brought a weak, bitter smile to Suimei's face, as if something unpleasant had been discovered about him.

"Ah... hahaha. Yeah, I'd heard that we were free to roam the palace, so I'd gone for a walk to settle myself. Was I somehow incorrect about that?"

"No, there was nothing inappropriate about that. Indeed, I'd given explicit orders to that effect. No, it's not that incident that concerns me."

"Then what, might I ask?"

"This."

"?"

Confusion was written all over Suimei's face. It must be noted, however, that that expression was not born of his true feelings. Having mentioned Felmenia, but having said nothing about her, it was clear that he had

understood from the very beginning the purpose of this line of questioning, but fully intended nonetheless to play dumb. Indeed, from the very moment he'd been summoned for questioning, he'd begun this show of ignorance. To have been summoned at such a time would undoubtedly give rise to some misgivings. If the King were Suimei, he'd have made some preparations beforehand. Given his powers, he would likely have readied himself to make a forceful escape if necessary. Since the other party was a mage who had defeated Felmenia, it wasn't like there was much the King could do; escape should be simple for Suimei.

With that in mind, the fact that he had not done so seemed to show that he thought he could wrap things up nicely by simply playing the fool.

Accordingly, though he knew that continuing would be dangerous, the King had no choice but to press forward.

"What I want to know is: what exactly did you do to Felmenia?"

" 'What did I do?' I can't say I understand what you mean."

"Suimei-dono, you very well know what I mean. Please be honest—"

"Forgive my disrespect, but are you sure that continuing would be wise?"

As if to drown out the King's voice, Suimei interrupted his words with a razor-edged "suggestion" in stark contrast to the polite tone he'd been using.

Understanding the warning implicit in Suimei's words, he nevertheless continued, "Suimei-dono. I want to know."

Seeing the King persist despite having recognized his warning, Suimei abandoned his reverent posture and rose to his feet.

With a wave of his hands, a cloak appeared from out of thin air and settled on his shoulders.

Although he didn't quite understand what had just happened, but it was evident that this was Suimei's magic. This was something that a mage of their world lacked the capability to comprehend, a spell of Suimei's repertoire.

Appearing on his face next was an expression that made his former look of fear seem but an illusion. His gentle expression was replaced with a sharp look which carried with it a proud air that the King had only seen in other mages.

Typically, this audience room would be filled with people who would have berated Suimei for his arrogance, but at this moment, there were none.

Seeing the King's gaze captured by this first glimpse of him as a magician, Suimei sighed.

"—Honestly. That girl's shown no trace of having kicked the bucket, so I'm sincerely surprised things have been exposed to this degree."

"So that's really..."

"Yes, it's as you imagine. My identity as a magician was discovered by that girl when we first arrived, so I searched for the first opportunity to shut her mouth, and so here we are. —On that note, that girl shouldn't be able to speak a word, so how did you figure things out, Your Majesty?"

"I took the proactive role in questioning her. Whenever she failed to respond, it signified that I had guessed correctly."

At this succinct explanation, Suimei expressed an "Ah" of enlightenment.

"So that's how it is; I completely missed that possibility. Indeed, the contract binding her can be circumvented by not speaking a word."

His words were delivered casually as if reminiscing, when suddenly his gaze sharpened and focused on the King.

"Then why did you call me here? I am, after all, the man who holds that woman's life in his hands. Since you know as much, for you to have called me here without any bodyguards to protect you... That this is dangerous should be incredibly apparent."

This was indeed readily apparent, and had been the danger inherent in this summons. Despite knowing the danger posed, he'd nonetheless called Suimei forth without any countermeasures in place. Thus, Suimei's question was understandable; nevertheless, it had been necessary for the

King to call him here.

“—There is undoubtedly cause for concern, but it is also the truth that Suimei-dono and Hero-dono were both brought here at my command. That is reality. Furthermore, that I have pushed our world’s unreasonable problems on the hands of all of you, who are not of our world, is also reality.”

To bare his fangs at Suimei was unconscionable. To do so would make him nothing more than a wolf in sheep’s clothing. An utterly unreasonable plan of action.

“ ... ”

“Suimei-dono. For having brought you here to this foreign place and having failed to stop my subjects from scorning you, I ask your forgiveness. Moreover, to ask you to heed a request on top of all of that is indeed rude of me. Nonetheless, I must tell you that I still want to know. Would that be alright?”

“Why do you want to know so badly? It’s nothing to you if you don’t know, right?”

“Perhaps what you say is correct, however, but if I were to avert my eyes and pretend to have seen nothing, and were she to lose her life in the process, it would be too late for regret.”

“—Even if it’s someone as haughty as that woman?”

"Just so. She is my subject, and thus it is only right that I do my best to protect her."

Those words again elicited a sigh from Suimei.

"As long as she does not speak, there is no threat to her life, none whatsoever. Alright, with that, we're done here, right?"

"No, not yet."

"I believe there's nothing else worthy of discussion?" Suimei replied, a strange look on his face.

Things had taken an unexpected turn. Even though the topic at hand had concluded, there was still more to ask?

"Suimei-dono, I am still fully ignorant of your situation. As the one responsible for having brought you to this world, I wish to know. What kind of person are you? What do you plan to do from now on? I desire that you be frank with me. If at all possible, I would hope that you would be open with me."

These words truly came from his heart.

When it came to Suimei, as long as he and Felmenia kept quiet, then that would be that. Those who knew of his circumstances would remain just the two. With that, things would return to the status quo: he would have summoned the Hero and sent him off to battle with the Maou.

However, to act in such a way would be to discard all responsibility as the one who had brought them to this world. Since he had taken action to bring them here of his own accord, were he to simply ignore any problems that arose, focusing only on his own needs, even if they possessed the power to free him from this situation, such a path could only be described as irresponsible. Instead, he hoped to understand Suimei's plans, and thus to provide whatever support was within his ability to offer; that was only reasonable.

However—

"...Of course, I do not intend to force a response. Prying into something that Suimei-dono does not want to reveal is simply my wishful thinking. If this is truly something that you do not want to speak of, then do not mind me. That being said, I still ask that you understand."

The King bowed his head from where he sat on his throne, something that a ruler of a nation should never do. However, in order to protect the beliefs that he held dear to him, he could do naught else.

As he raised his head a moment later, his eyes caught sight of Suimei, utterly taken aback.

"Why would you do something like that? Why would you disgrace yourself to such an extent?"

From his expression, the degree of his surprise was evident.

With that, Suimei heaved a deep sigh, as if he'd finally resigned himself to something.

"No, rather, please forgive me for my impertinence. If there is something Your Majesty wishes this person of humble standing to answer, then please, ask freely."

—Suimei continued to stand. His posture would likely be seen as disrespectful by others, but from the way his arrogant manner had vanished, and the change in his tone, it seemed that this was his true self. This was neither the confused, lost Suimei standing by the side of Reiji and Mizuki when they had been first summoned, nor was it the haughty, blunt persona he had shown just a moment ago. No, this was Suimei as he truly was: Yakagi Suimei, the magician.

For that reason, this was the greatest respect that he could show.

Suimei having expressed his willingness to comply, the King began his line of questioning.

"What kind of person are you?"

"In my world, we are known as magicians. We are scholars who delve into the mysteries of the world. More colloquially, we are existences roughly equivalent to the mages of your world."

"Magicians..."

He mumbled the word he had just heard. Due to the influence of the

hero summoning, the word “mage” had been mentioned quite frequently of late. However, this term struck him quite differently. Perhaps because it had been Suimei who had said it, the nature of the word had been conveyed: that it described something different from a “mage.” (“魔術師” is the term used to describe magicians of Suimei’s world, while “魔法使い” is used by the people of the other world. In the vernacular, they mean the same thing, but here, the author is likely emphasizing the difference in the individual characters to suggest the difference between their roles in the respective worlds, “師” meaning “specialist” and “使い” meaning “user.” Furthermore, the “術” in “魔術” is used to describe techniques or skills.)

The King immediately followed up with another question.

“Why, then, do you want to keep this all a secret? Putting us aside, you haven’t even allowed Hero-dono or Mizuki-dono to know.”

“You’ve already heard this from Reiji and Mizuki, but our world is different from yours: a world that has relied on science for its growth. In our world, magic is something that’s been forced into the underworld, having been targeted by every major power there. That’s why, on the surface of things, magicians aren’t something that exist in my world. Were we to appear once more in the open, we would undoubtedly be wiped out by those powers for non-compliance. For that reason, as far as the public is concerned, there is no such thing as a magician.”

As he finished speaking, he added a final remark, “That’s why I’ve hidden what I really am; caution is necessary.”

“From what you’ve said, it seems that not only could you not allow Reiji-dono and Mizuki-dono to know, you had to spare no effort to keep

Felmenia silent because she'd discovered your true nature?"

"Yes. At that time, I wasn't entirely certain how much she knew. How I would ensure her silence was a matter to be decided once that had been determined. Accordingly, I intentionally exposed myself in order to draw her in. Who could have guessed that she'd have set a trap for me with that dangerous golem... Since she had revealed herself as having no intentions of settling the matter with words, I took appropriate action. That was my decision at the time, anyway."

Something of what he had said piqued the King's interest.

"Golem?"

"That's correct. A rather formidable creation with the appearance of a knight. Reacting to its ambush, I destroyed it with my magic."

"Mage Slamas' golem, huh."

When it came to the golem that had attacked Suimei, the King more or less had an understanding of its origins. Within the palace, the only golems were those created by Slamas. Indeed, when it came to autonomous golems, it could only be him.

Slamas' golems were masterfully crafted, powerful existences. For her to have brought something like that out, Felmenia's hardline attitude prior to her defeat was quite clear.

However.

“Be that as it may, even if Felmenia had gone that far, don’t you think you went a bit overboard with your response?”

Progressing immediately to battle from such a situation seemed rather hasty, there should still have been some room for discussion.

Even if Felmenia had been the one to initiate things, he couldn’t help but ask that question.

In answer to his question, Suimei took on a strangely serious look.

“I won’t deny that I somewhat lost my cool. Nevertheless, I am one who treads the path of magic and we magicians adhere to a magician’s etiquette. When faced with a wild dog – sorry, a prideful young girl – raising her nose at me, to fail to punish such ferocious conduct would be unthinkable. That said, with regards to what happened afterward, well... I have to admit I might have been venting my anger at having been forcefully brought to this world.”

Suimei revealed a wry smile befitting one his age, and sighed.

“...Seriously, what a naughty brat.”

“Magicians are just such people. People who consider only what they stand to gain, without the least interest in anything else, who never spare a moment’s consideration for how their actions might affect those around them. That notwithstanding, considering how unrestrained Your Majesty has allowed Felmenia to be, I don’t think you have any right to complain.”

"That's true."

Certainly, even though he was well aware of Felmenia's intentions, he had washed his hands of the matter. He definitely did not have the moral authority to condemn Suimei's actions. Unrestrained magic use could be used for an uncountable number of evils. Although Suimei clearly possessed the power to realize his desires, he had chosen to avoid causing problems, instead holing up in his room. Even when he had left his room to investigate the palace, venturing through the storehouses, offices, and treasury – places that housed priceless objects – he had not done a thing.

In contrast, Felmenia's violent actions could only be seen as deserving of the response that had come. He had no way of knowing what ideologies presided in the other world, but given the danger posed by the golem trap, even if Suimei had taken her life, they didn't have the right to complain.

While he was thus reflecting, Suimei suddenly turned to face a nearby pillar.

"There's no way—" the King thought to himself as Suimei suddenly broke the silence.

"...So that's how it is. I was pretty much just venting my anger on whatever was right before me; that's why you can rest assured, I won't do anything like that to you again."

Those words didn't seem to have been intended for him— no, they had

clearly been intended for someone else. Suimei had meant those words for Felmenia. A figure stepped out from behind the pillar.

"..."

Felmenia stepped out from behind the shadow of the pillar, a look of astonishment on her face.

Suimei gave her an indifferent glance before turning to face the King once more.

"...How long have you known?"

"To that, let me ask in turn: why would you ever assume I wouldn't notice?"

"..."

That was a good point. Suimei was a magician. Rather than assuming he would always remain ignorant, it was better to work off the assumption that he would always figure things out.

"Suimei-dono. About this—"

"You don't need to say anything. When you told me it was just the two of us at the start of our discussion, that was clearly a lie, but when you consider that it was for the sake of that woman who is a precious subject of yours, then it's not like I can't understand."

"I'm sorry."

The King offered a frank apology. That Felmenia had been hidden in the shadows at his side was not because she'd been guarding him, but because he was worried about her. Were Felmenia present at the scene, then perhaps Suimei would have been less than honest about her circumstances. Were she not in attendance, however, then she would have remained in ignorance as to the details of her circumstances. Thus he'd ordered her to hide herself.

The result? Suimei, having seen through their pretense from the very beginning, had nonetheless said what he had said.

Her face ashen, Felmenia called Suimei's name.

"S-Suimei-dono..."

"Whatever it is you want to say, there's no need to look like that, is there? It's like you're cowering; if you're a magician, then you should face even death with your back straight and head held high. Aren't you older than me?"

"Ah..."

Felmenia closed her mouth at his acerbic tone, unable to respond to his words.

Since Suimei seemed to be awaiting her question, she spoke.

"Then the reason you were investigating the hero summoning circle was..."

Because of his determination to return home.

"I've already said that I wish to return to our own world. There are things there that I absolutely cannot afford not to do. Moreover—"

"Moreover...?"

"...Before the day comes that Reiji and Mizuki wish to return, I will need to have first prepared the way. Knowing that they will face danger, but unable to be at their side, this is something that I must do as a magician."

"Ah—" The unexpected response elicited a gasp. Although his goal was as he had stated, to find a way to return home, unexpectedly, he had also taken his friends into consideration and sought to prepare a path leading them home.

Or actually, what was really surprising was...

"Wait, don't tell me you can understand that thing?!"

"Given enough time, it shouldn't prove that difficult."

“That’s...!”

This was the hero summoning circle, something that was widely acknowledged to be beyond the realm of human comprehension, something that could neither be analyzed nor understood! And he’d said that he could unravel its mysteries!

This was a legacy countless generations old. Both the amount of mana to be used and the incantation to be chanted had to be enacted precisely as described by the instructions that had been left behind before it could be activated. Because its construction was far too advanced, the mechanisms behind its operation were not, as of yet, understood.

And yet this boy had said that he could do it! Furthermore...

With a tone of slight surprise, Suimei continued, “Although I’ve spent some time studying spirit summoning objects before, to find something this complicated here, of all places, is rather unexpected.”

It might be described as a stroke of luck.

“Seeing how much you worry about your friends, why haven’t you told them anything? Though even if he knew, Yuusha-dono...”

“Your Majesty. If they knew what I really was, it’d only put them in danger once we return to our own world,” Suimei interrupted.

There were more reasons than his personal safety as to why he couldn’t let them know his true nature.

"And so you just keep it all to yourself?"

"Your Majesty, I can't say I understand what your world is like, but our world is like a nest of vipers."

"A nest of vipers?"

"Yes. In our world, even if someone does their best to keep quiet, simply possessing knowledge is a danger all its own. Reading someone's memories, erasing memories, forcing someone to tell you what they know – if we're talking about magic, there are too many ways to count. Where we're from, to openly make my identity known would carry a terrible price. Beyond that, our world has its fair share of madmen who bare their fangs at people just for having the knowledge that magicians exist."

"Magic in your world is such a horrific thing?"

"Just so."

The King fell into a thoughtful silence at Suimei's honest nod.

Assuming Suimei's words were true, he still thought openness was the right choice, while at the same time, something that simply couldn't be done. When compared, the magic of his world was far darker and more insidious than their own. Enemies lurked around every corner and danger was constant, and so they'd been forced into hiding. Given that, the fact that Suimei had chosen to hide who he was made a lot of sense.

"Once Reiji and Mizuki desire to return home, I won't have much choice but to be honest with them then. But having been at their side until now, and having kept my identity a secret all this time... it's going to be hard."

"I imagine."

As he'd said, once they saw the magic that would take them home, there'd be no way around an explanation. They'd learned magic now, after all; once they returned home, there would be rules about magic back home that they'd have to know. Although he acknowledged that revealing the truth was a necessity, but as he thought about how Suimei felt, he felt that it wouldn't be quite that simple.

With all these thoughts in mind, the King's expression revealed his complicated feelings. In a regretful tone, he spoke up once more.

"...So, in short, you still have no plans to join them?"

"I've already said this, but I don't like doing reckless things."

"For someone like you, who can defeat Felmenia, it doesn't seem that reckless to me? Moreover, if it's you, Suimei-dono, couldn't you become Yuusha-dono's strength?"

"Probably. But I don't think there's any need for that."

"Why do you say that?"

"Although we argued pretty heatedly back then, but Reiji is not that shallow a person. Even if he's always doing things that I don't expect, he does think things through, and when the moment comes, he's surprisingly cautious when making final judgment. Moreover, when you factor in the tremendous powers bestowed by the hero summoning, my worries are really just a small thing. While there's no guarantee that the Maou suppression force will actually succeed, but I don't think he'll die that easily."

"I see."

"That's why I don't need to worry that much," Suimei said with a smile.

He seemed to trust Reiji quite deeply.

Suimei, however, continued with an uneasy tone, "They'll probably still run into some hard times, though."

This was probably because he'd thoughtfully considered their path ahead and couldn't be described as indifferent to those hard times they were to face.

At this, the King again sought confirmation from Suimei.

"Just to confirm, Felmenia..."

"As I said before, as long as she doesn't say anything unnecessary, it'll

be as if nothing happened at all. —Actually, I guess it doesn't matter at this point."

With a look of relief, Suimei pulled out a white sheet of paper. At first glance, that sheet of paper, white as snow, didn't look any different from any other piece of paper. A closer look, however, would reveal some writing and a seal of blood.

Suimei proceeded to fold the sheet as if preparing to tear it apart.

"S-Suimei-dono! W-wait—!"

The blood drained from Felmenia's face as she cried out, though Suimei acted as if he hadn't heard.

The sound of paper tearing filled her ears.

As she fell to the floor, engulfed by emotion, shreds of torn paper fluttered to the audience room floor.

Emptying his hands, Suimei snapped his fingers whereupon the paper fragments were consumed by flame and disappeared.

"Ah..."

"Miss Royal Mage, with this, the curse upon you has been lifted. You owe your life to His Majesty."

Putting all thoughts of Felmenia out of his mind with a snort, Suimei turned to the King once more.

"Is that okay?" the King asked.

"You wish for there to be trust between us, Your Majesty; this was the wall separating us. Between us, there is no longer any need for such a thing."

He continued, "However, I ask that you do not inform Reiji and the others. I request that you promise to neither reveal nor hint at any of this. At least until the time comes when I have no other choice..."

"I understand. It will be as you say."

The King promised to do as Suimei had requested. Seeing as the other party had conceded this much already, he had no reason to refuse.

He then proceeded to inquire about Suimei's plans for the future.

"What do you plan to do after this? If there's anything within the palace that can aid you in your goal of returning home, don't hesitate to ask."

They were the guests of the King and his subjects who had brought them here. That responsibility would not disappear. It had been for that reason they had willingly hosted them here in the palace. To continue to care for Suimei until the magic needed to return home was completed was only natural. Well, that was as long as Suimei intended to stay, of course; if he had other plans, then he'd like to know.

Suimei shook his head.

"That's unnecessary. When Reiji and the others depart, I will as well."

"What for?"

"I plan to visit the Nelferian Empire. The Empire stands as the crossroads of three different nations, and so it's the best place to go to acquire the information and materials I'll need," Suimei explained.

Indeed, the Nelferian Empire was a central hub that had to be passed through when reaching these kingdoms, Aster included. Subsequently, it was far more connected. Because the Aster Kingdom was an allied nation, travel between the two would be fairly simple. Just as Suimei had said, from the perspective of gathering intel and resources, that was indeed the most suitable location.

If he had to be honest with himself, the King would rather not have let such a powerful mage as Suimei out of his reach. However, seeing as restraining his actions was not within their ability, trying to force him to stay wasn't a good idea.

"...So that's how it is. Well, then if there's anything I can help with, please feel free to let me know. Knowing what you can do, any aid I might render is likely inconsequential, but if there's anything I can do, I will do my best."

Although he'd offered to support Suimei in his goal, Suimei did not

nod.

"I greatly appreciate the sentiment, but please don't mind me."

"Why not? This is a foreign land for you, Suimei-dono. You really don't need any help whatsoever?"

Suimei was a person from another world with a different culture and customs. Moreover, he lacked a guide to rely on. For that reason, life here would be very difficult indeed. A certain amount of assistance should be expected.

However.

"It's fine. After this, I'll be seen as someone who couldn't take it anymore and left. There's no need to offer any support to such a person. That'll be the best considering our respective reputations."

"But..."

"After having caused such a commotion upon our arrival and then having subsequently holed up in my room, your people's opinion of me is rather low. If you were to assist such an individual, while there would be some who would support your actions, many, many more would complain and resent you for doing so. This is not in your best interest."

Suimei's reading of the situation was spot on. Particularly were he to leave the palace, the King had to admit, there would be no small amount of gossiping and backbiting. Were he to further offer Suimei any

assistance, the people would be furious. "Why is the King taking care of a useless piece of garbage like that? Does he only care about people from that world?" *etc.*

"I understand that, but I want to offer my help nonetheless?"

"Believe me, I appreciate it, but it's too troublesome."

"Alright..."

Suimei's forceful tone had left me speechless. This Suimei seemed to be quite stubborn, not caring one whit about either others' opinion of him or the offered aid, thinking them not worth considering.

Perhaps such a notion had been inspired purely by confidence in his abilities, but it couldn't be said that such confidence was without basis.

Just what are those eyes of his staring at? They're definitely not looking at me, the King thought to himself. No, those are eyes envisioning the difficulties that lie ahead, eyes that fully intend to challenge them head-on.

That powerful gaze didn't seem like it could have come from someone his age.

And so—

"...On the road of life, there will inevitably be mountains to climb. No

matter how big they are, or how tall, any without the ability to cross such obstacles has no right to call themselves a magician. And I, Yakagi Suimei, am a magician, someone who challenges the mysteries of the world head-on, with my head held high. And so allow me to reiterate, Your Majesty, I sincerely appreciate the offer, but the sentiment is more than enough."

The young man before him, speaking in a solemn tone, showed no weaknesses. There was in him a pride and a strength unique to those geniuses who wholeheartedly chased after miracles.

This young man was anything but ordinary. "An ordinary person caught up in the hero summoning" he was not.

As he watched the young man with a renewed sense of astonishment, Suimei spoke again in a grave tone, mocking himself.

"...Though even if I try to sound cool, in the end, I'm just a coward who, fearing for his own life, ran away from battle."

"If that's the case, then all of us who have pushed the burden of the Maou on completely unrelated people are just as much to blame. That, of course, includes myself..."

Who could blame Suimei? The only ones who could judge his decision to avoid battling the Maou were those who had challenged the terror of the Maou directly. No, those who were hiding themselves where it was safe had no right to say any such things. Particularly given that Suimei was someone who had resolved to challenge the difficulties lying ahead all alone, there was not a one with the right to judge him.

To someone like Suimei, with numerous dreams and endless desires, staying here would only lead to stagnance. He couldn't be sure, but staying here would likely only cause Suimei pain. As he thought back to the young man anxiously shouting in this room before, he couldn't help but be grieved.

From that, he had been able to tell how Suimei felt, because he'd felt such feelings before. However, those had only been temporary partings from his daughter... he had no way of truly understanding just how Suimei felt.

The King sank into silence, lost in a whirlpool of emotion.

Slowly, Suimei spoke.

"Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

"In that case—"

Accepting his good will, the King asked many more questions. About him, about Reiji and Mizuki. Not restricting the conversation to just magic, they even talked about the relationship between the three friends.

For the two, this open conversation had been a long time coming.

Time passed, and Suimei left to return to his room. As he watched the young man depart, the King turned to his subject by his side.

"...Felmenia."

"Your Majesty."

"A truly enlightening discussion. Yuusha-dono and Mizuki-dono likely have never heard such things, correct?"

"It is as you say, Your Majesty."

The binding on her having been released, her expression having returned to normal, Felmenia agreed. She was the teacher of the Hero as well as someone acquainted with Reiji more personally, but she'd never had such an intimate discussion with the Hero. It was, from her perspective, rather refreshing.

Both parties fully understood one another, nothing hidden, and had come to an understanding. Any possible concerns and anxiety had been dispelled.

"...I don't suppose... There's no way Suimei-dono could have foreseen this outcome from the very beginning, could he?"

Felmenia frowned.

"Even assuming he did, he was way too careless still. If reality ever

diverged from what he'd expected, then there'd be grievous consequences, and yet we've clearly seen he hasn't prepared anything for such an eventuality."

Just as she'd said, if the King had been unwilling to bow his head, and instead taken a hardline stance, then Suimei's prediction would have been incorrect, and an insurmountable gap would have resulted. That notwithstanding, Felmenia's remark that Suimei had made no preparations was undeniably false, the evidence being on Suimei's person directly.

"Felmenia. Suimei-dono's clothing... do you know what it represents?"

"His clothing? That's his combat attire— Ah!"

She'd realized. Combat attire.

Having understood what he'd meant, she looked at the King with admiration in her eyes.

"You are certainly wise, my king. Although Suimei-dono said not a word, you clearly understood."

"The second he entered, I felt an atmosphere in the room of a general, returning victorious from battle. That's how I knew," he answered, reminiscing.

As the cloak had appeared out of thin air to rest on Suimei's person, he'd been reminded of a general, returning from battle, traces of blood

still on his clothes. He'd seen in his clothing the feeling of a man ready to return to the battlefield at any moment.

There was simply no way Suimei had not made any preparations beforehand, either for peaceful reconciliation or something more forceful

"...I fear he was prepared no matter the outcome. If we presented ourselves as his enemy, then we would be dealt with accordingly. How we treated him would be how we would be dealt with. However the situation developed, he had an appropriate response prepared. We have, after all, numerous openings on this side. He'd probe those openings and determine if we could be trusted enough to settle this peacefully. If he determined that we sought to harm him, then he would have been far more forceful."

"Then does that not mean that tonight was a trap of sorts?"

"Even so, no harm no foul. Suimei-dono said that he has magic to manipulate memories. Even if things had taken a turn for the worse, and even if he couldn't allow Reiji-dono or Mizuki-dono to know, he likely had ways to handle such a situation. If we had had any intention of harming him, there was no way we could allow the Hero to find out, and so we'd have to avoid a commotion at all costs. Our only choice would be to ambush him with a small force of our most elite. —Given that he'd already read the situation in advance, do you think there is any possibility of our victory in such an event?"

Having been freed from her oath, Felmenia could now answer such questions. Given Suimei's strength, would it be possible for the palace's most elite forces to successfully ambush him?

She considered for a moment before answering solemnly.

"...None whatsoever."

"Is that so. Huh."

Surprisingly, Felmenia's to-the-point answer had not surprised him. He'd already guessed that Suimei's strength was of such a level, and so he readily accepted her assessment.

"But still, Your Majesty, do you really think Suimei-dono had thought things through to such an extent?"

"That, who knows?"

"Huh...?"

"This is all just conjecture. There's really no way to verify the truth of it. No matter how logical what we've just discussed might be, as long as Suimei-dono never says a word, then conjecture is all it will ever be."

"T-That's true."

Felmenia's brow furrowed. Whether or not she truly understood, and even if she'd been the one to point things out, there was really no way to truly understand what Suimei had been thinking.

Although—

“For him as well, bowing my head to him must have come as a complete shock.”

Indeed, this statement was almost certainly true. Because he, who should not be bowing to anyone, had lowered his head before him, Suimei had finally decided him worthy of trust.

“...That I can sympathize with.”

“That’s fine, don’t worry about it.”

The matter settled, the King changed the topic, his tone grave.

“—Now then, Felmenia. Let us discuss your punishment.”

Felmenia did not object. Before they had summoned Suimei, she had already expressed her willingness to accept responsibility. She waited silently.

“...Understood. No matter what it is, I submit myself wholeheartedly.”

“Then, Royal Mage of the Court, Felmenia Stingray: I strip you of your title, and—”

And with that, the long night for magician and kingdom both, drew to a close.

Chapter 11: The Hero Sets Out

—Before the doors of the Imperial Palace of the Aster Kingdom, Camelia. Here, surrounded by soldiers standing in formation, musicians, and higher-ranked knights, Reiji, Mizuki, and Titania rode a dazzling chariot.

Outside the palace gates, the residents of the royal capital of Mehter had gathered to send them off.

As part of their first step toward the eventual goal of defeating the Maou, the King had organized this public parade for Reiji and the others. Suimei, feeling slightly regretful, said, “Finally, this day has come.”

And indeed, as Suimei had said, the day of their journey had finally come. As the parade drew to a close, the Maou suppression force – Reiji and the others, accompanied by a vast number of knights – would thus finally begin their journey. A feeling of sadness at their parting was inevitable.

Reiji, on the other hand, wore a look of clear excitement on his face. Whether this was because he looked forward to the road ahead, or had simply chosen to wear such an expression to hide the anxiety he felt was unclear. Just as Suimei had settled his feelings and prepared to speak, Reiji, optimism still shining bright, spoke up first.

“Well, we’re taking off.”

"You sure say that lightly."

Suimei's sincere sorrow was replaced with irritation. Responding, Reiji's expression sobered greatly.

"It's not like that. I've put a lot of thought into this, you know? My answer at that time was definitely the right one."

"No, it was definitely wrong. No matter how I look at it, I can only say that it's wrong."

Staring off into the distance, the feelings gripping his heart wouldn't let go. Titania, same as always, her hands clutched before her chest, stepped in.

"Suimei-sama..."

She was the princess of the Aster Kingdom. Her feelings towards Suimei's words were, of course, quite complicated. On the one hand, her certainty of the necessity of the Maou suppression force had never wavered, though she, like her father, felt a terrible sense of guilt that would not be extinguished.

As if to dispel the worry in her eyes, Reiji patted her lightly on the shoulder and, approaching Suimei, spoke, his words full of resolve.

"No, that's not how it is, Suimei. Setting aside whether or not I go, the Maou's forces will never stop their attacks on human lands. Seeing as we have no way to go home, then it's not like there's anywhere for us to run

either. In other words, the day will inevitably come when we will have to fight the Maou. Although nothing's for certain, but when it comes to confronting the enemy, the sooner, the better. That is, of course, providing that this is all with the goal of taking down the Maou."

Speaking at length, Reiji bared his feelings on the matter. Sure enough, he had put a great deal of thought into something as ridiculous as wanting to participate in the war. As he'd considered things, the realization that war with the Maou would be inevitable at some point. He'd come to the understanding that their actions now were their best chance of a counteroffensive.

Being that as it may, Suimei was unrelenting, and continued to press the point.

"Reiji, do you really think that just by not backing down, there will eventually be a day when you can overthrow the Maou?"

"I don't have the ability to make that sort of judgment. To be honest, I think that if worst comes to worst, there's about an 80% chance that we'll die."

These were not words blinded by optimism, but rather words grounded in reality.

Nonetheless—

"Seriously, you're always like this, never losing hope until all is lost."

"Is that not okay?"

"I can't say I hate that part of you, but just this once, I really don't think you're making the right choice. The Maou's army is nothing like those thugs and hooligans from back home, you know?"

Suimei was referring to their life from before. Reiji, and his strong sense of justice that came from God knows where, would frequently find himself engaged in brawls with thugs.

Thankfully, due to his skills and natural disposition, he'd never really had a problem before. The difficulty was that the Maou and the ruffians from back home were opponents of a completely different level. The likelihood that things would be resolved as smoothly as they always had before was incredibly low.

That notwithstanding, Reiji, his voice filled with confidence, spoke again.

"Even so, I still think this is the better way."

"...I'm seriously talking to myself here, aren't I?"

"Hahahaha."

Looking at the maddened expression on his friend's face, Reiji laughed happily. An open conversation between two friends who knew each other so well was definitely something to be enjoyed, a happy thing.

His friend having honestly bared his full thoughts on the matter, Suimei responded in kind.

“...I understand. It’s not that you’re rushing to your death, but that you’re fighting to protect your life here. Forgive me, I said too much. That said, please don’t force yourself.”

A moment’s thought made it all clear. Although, at first glance, his actions might have appeared inspired more by brawn than by brains, but in retrospect, that was not the case at all. No, this was born of a desire to protect their lives here, as well as more than a hint of the stubbornness that could always be found in his actions. That said, Suimei couldn’t help but acknowledge the truth in his words.

At his friend’s serious reply, Reiji, a somewhat serious look on his face, replied.

“Don’t worry about it. Just after this, we’ll head straight for the Maou—”

“Are you kidding me...”

“Hahahaha. Yes, yes, I am. No, first things first. I need to become stronger.”

Seeing his friend left speechless by his abrupt insertion of a joke amid their serious back-and-forth, Reiji broke into laughter. Seriously, making that kind of joke during a serious discussion? Just what was this guy thinking?

No, he understood. Reiji's heart was likely filled with unease. Filled with anxiety, he'd tried to lighten the mood, and so he'd made a harmless joke to try and dispel the negative emotions gripping him.

Indeed, he couldn't blame him for his hastiness. He couldn't be mad about it. It was, after all, born of the need to relieve the pressure being exerted by all parties on the one who bore the title of Hero.

Thus, Suimei leaned in, and whispering into Reiji's ear with a sober tone, he said, "...The moment you feel that things are looking bad, I want you to run, and take Mizuki with you. Find somewhere to go, and hide. Even if you are the Hero, this is real life, not fiction. There's no guarantee that you'll actually be able to beat the Maou."

"...I understand, but I fully intend to fight to my very limits."

"You really are a stubborn bastard, aren't you?"

At Reiji's utter unwillingness to compromise, Suimei was again left speechless. Reiji spoke once more, but this time, to ask a question.

"So what are your plans after this, Suimei?"

"Me? Well, pretty much this. I'm going to head out."

"Wha...?"

This was his first time hearing this. Definitely the first time. Not once had Suimei ever explained his plans to Reiji and the others.

Mizuki, speaking for the three others, questioned him next, her voice tinged with both surprise and concern.

"Suimei-kun, what do you plan to do by leaving the palace?"

"Eh, nothing special. I just want to experience life outside for a bit," he replied indifferently, hiding his true intentions.

At these words, Reiji's face wrinkled in worry.

"Life outside?"

"Look for work. You know, things like that."

"Suimei-sama, if you stay in the palace, then my father will provide for your needs. There's no need to force yourself to live outside," Titania interrupted.

"Oh, I'm sure, but still, I'm leaving."

"May I ask why? Although the capital is safe enough, but as a person from another world, you lack both knowledge of this world or the protection bestowed upon the hero. Outside of the palace, there's no guarantee of your safety. I don't see the benefits of leaving?"

It was just as she said. Given that they knew nothing of his true abilities or his actual goal, her words were quite logical.

"No... Well, it's probably a bit rude of me to say this, but... Living in the palace makes me feel pretty awful."

"Ah..."

Titania showed a sorrowful look. She seemed to understand; she'd probably heard all the bad things that had been said about him, and thus sank into silence.

Immediately following, Reiji spoke, not bothering to hide his displeasure.

"Why don't I try and talk to them for you?"

And what was that supposed to mean? He couldn't possibly plan on talking with the palace people one by one, hoping to change their opinions about Suimei, could he? That was completely insane.

"It's okay, I'm fine like this. At this point, what purpose would that serve? It'd only make things worse."

"...Even if you say that..."

"It's fine. Anyway, I need to think over my plans for the rest of the day."

At this point, Mizuki suddenly cut in.

"What do you mean 'plans for the rest of the day'? What about money?"

"I plan to sell the stuff I brought with me that are useless here, like textbooks and the like."

"Can you even sell those things? Everything's in Japanese."

He'd long since prepared an answer to her surprised question. He, of course, was confident in his ability to sell his things.

He turned to Titania, looking to confirm something.

"I should be able to sell them, right?"

"You should be able to, yes. I imagine the prices would be rather high due either to merchants mistaking them for grimoires or nobles aiming to help..."

Titania had likely seen their textbooks before, and knew what they were. As a person of this world, her opinion was likely to be on point.

It was a fact that their books were written entirely in Japanese. However, it was precisely because they were in an unreadable language that they had acquired something of a mysterious nature to the people of this world. Furthermore, because their covers were rather fancifully done, it was quite likely that people would easily mistake their value.

"I plan to raise prices quite a bit; I want to sell them for quite a sum. That should take care of my living expenses."

"...Honestly, Suimei-kun. Isn't that what we call a scam?"

"It's not like I'm lying or anything. Who cares anyway?"

His words notwithstanding, Suimei himself felt that he was being rather underhanded here. On the other hand, his actions were relatively harmless. Those who purchased his books for resale would likely make a good profit, and those who bought the books would be excited over their good fortune. Finally, even if he'd said he'd try to inflate prices, it wasn't like he intended to charge some extravagant sum for them either.

"Are you really going to be okay?"

"Yeah, I should be just fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'm sure. At the very least, I already know what I'm going to do for the rest of the day anyway."

Mizuki looked torn. It didn't look like she'd quite accepted things. If he'd accepted training in magic and combat as they'd had, or, at the very least, had received some instruction regarding the things of this world, she likely wouldn't have felt this way. Unfortunately, he'd only absorbed

some very basic knowledge offhand. Her concern was natural.

That being the case, he could only try and hand wave his way through an explanation.

Thinking for a moment, he decided to question the worried Mizuki in turn.

"On that note, rather than worrying about me, Mizuki, shouldn't you be worrying about yourself?"

"I-I'm okay! I've even already learned how to use magic, after all."

Indeed, she and Reiji had both been taught some magic. From Titania's perspective, Mizuki had attained a level that put her on equal footing with Reiji; there was no reason for her to be worried. Suimei, however, had been not been speaking about that.

"That's what I mean. Magic. You've already learned magic now, but I want to remind you not to repeat what happened before. Right, Reiji?"

Looking to the friend who understood what he meant for confirmation, Reiji could only laugh.

"A... ahahahahaha!"

"S-S-S-Suimei-kun! You promised to never talk about that again!"

Mizuki, on the other hand, was flustered and blushed a deep red. As far as Mizuki was concerned, this was a memory better left unremembered. What he'd been referring to had been something that had happened in the past, when they'd first met, where she'd been, to some degree, someone they couldn't leave alone.

Titania, who was clueless about their shared history, tilted her head in puzzlement.

" 'What happened before?' "

"Yep, yep."

"Suimei-kun! That's not something you're allowed to ever talk about! Absolutely not! I'm not joking!"

Mizuki's frantic expression wasn't something she'd shown in their entire time here. Lending a hand to his panicked friend, Reiji turned to the confused Titania and offered an answer to her question.

"Mizuki's been through some stuff, Tia."

"I'm interested."

"Don't be! This is a huge secret that will forever stay between the three of us! It's a secret garden! A dangerous secret that can never be revealed to anyone ever!"

"If you're going to go that far, that only makes me even more interested..."

Titania revealed a hurt look at having been excluded. Suimei decided it was time to turn the topic away from Mizuki, he turned to their female companion who'd brought this all up in the first place.

"You know, Princess, you're also taking part in the Maou suppression force. Is that okay?"

"Ara, don't take me too lightly, Suimei-sama. I, too, have studied magic, and will definitely be of great help to Reiji-sama," Titania replied, sticking her chest out proudly.

He wasn't sure at what level her magic was, but that wasn't really what he'd been asking anyway.

"Princess, you're definitely versed in magic to be sure, but what I meant was if it was okay for a person of your standing?"

"There's no need to worry about that. There's still my father and his ministers. Even if I leave Aster, it poses no problem whatsoever."

"No, that's not what I meant either— "

As someone who possessed the delicate beauty of a butterfly or a flower, she was the princess beloved by all. Why would someone like that need to take part in such a dangerous venture? Moreover, she'd even received the king's support in doing so.

There wasn't a father alive who didn't love their child. Even if his daughter herself had been willing, how could he allow her to expose herself to such dangerous circumstances? Even if it was probably a bit crude to say as much, but such a princess had much more to offer her kingdom than just this.

Knowing all that, and allowing her to come along... what had been the reasoning behind such a thing?

"Suimei-sama, this is the duty I bear."

Was it really alright for her to just thrust herself into the heart of danger? As he'd prepared to ask her as much, she'd cut him off with those words, delivered in a solemn tone.

"Duty... is it?"

"...Yes. No matter how powerful Reiji-sama might be, we cannot push all of the responsibility onto his shoulders. On the contrary, there must be at least one from the Aster Kingdom who bears an equal burden. The one chosen for this was none other than myself. I've resolved myself."

"..."

Perhaps that was indeed the case. No, Titania's resolve wasn't at such a weak level that it could be called into doubt. Her powerful words had been heartfelt and unimpeachable. Titania had taken upon herself the mantle of responsibility and it was for that reason that she was here now.

Seeing her determination, he was struck by a feeling of sorrow. He could only imagine the bitterness the people of the Aster Kingdom must have felt. Thus, rather than strengthening her argument, her words had instead somehow weakened it.

"Suimei-sama?"

"...Seeing as that's the case, I must apologize my for rude words earlier. I leave Reiji and Mizuki in your care."

"Please, leave them to me. I will ensure that everyone returns home safely and soundly."

As she spoke, she nodded firmly. Although just for a moment, because the promise had come from the princess before him, just for a moment, he felt that it was certain to happen.

Suddenly, this princess with an iron will spoke to Suimei.

"I still have something I wish to say, Suimei-sama."

"Yes?"

"I already count Reiji-sama and Mizuki-sama among my dear friends. For that reason, I would ask that you, who are their friend, not be so formal with me. Would that be alright?"

The princess had voiced this wish of her own accord. This was not something that someone of her position should ever have requested of someone of his.

"Is that really okay?"

"Please."

Responding to his question, she had repeated her plea once more. Suimei calmed himself and gave his consent.

"...I understand. Let's do that then. Princess—"

"—It's 'Titania', Suimei," Titania countered, a faint smile on her face.

Such a smile could only be described as "divine." Were someone unfamiliar with the opposite sex faced with such a smile, they'd be done for. In some indescribable way, her smile reminded him of Reiji.

He couldn't allow himself to be charmed, though. Instead, he returned her smile.

"Right. It's a pleasure, Titania."

"With this, the four of us are all friends."

From this day forward, they'd be inseparable companions. As Reiji and

Mizuki watched on, in their eyes, Titania's joy seemed that of someone who had just made their first friend.

Abruptly, Suimei called out to Reiji.

"Hey."

"Hmm?"

"Uh, never mind."

Seeing Reiji's expression, without a hint of negativity, Suimei shut his mouth.

Originally, he'd planned on asking, "If there was a way to go back home, would you want to?" Something like, "If you're willing to wait, then I'll definitely make it happen."

But he'd stopped himself. Even if he'd said that, Reiji would not turn back from the path he'd chosen. All he'd achieve would be to further confuse the situation. Suimei would not allow himself to be an obstacle along his friend's path without reason. That's why it was better off left unsaid. He'd keep this all to himself until things progressed further.

"Good luck out there."

"Yeah, you too. Thanks, Suimei."

"Ah."

Reiji smiled as Suimei nodded his head. Trials lay ahead; he could only face them head-on with a light smile, and worry on his face, and courage in his heart.

...Finally the preparations for their journey finished. Titania turned to Reiji.

"It's time for us to go, Reiji-sama."

"Got it. Mizuki, stay close, alright?"

" ... "

At Reiji's extended hand, Mizuki nodded in embarrassment. Reiji's intentions were clearly purely aimed at making sure someone close to him did not encounter unnecessary danger, but Mizuki and Titania saw more in it than that. As Mizuki took Reiji's arm with both embarrassment and joy, Titania watched with an envious gaze.

"R-Reiji-sama! Me too!"

"Eh? Tia?!"

Reiji yelped in surprise as Titania grabbed his other arm.

A look of understanding appeared on his face as he took Titania's arm in his – though he clearly had not the least understanding of what was going on.

"Sure. Don't leave my side, Titania."

"—! Never!"

At Reiji's words, Titania smiled brightly and answered happily.

...A beautiful girl clinging to each arm, the hero majestically strode onto the chariot.

Were anyone to glance around, they'd notice the envious and hate-filled stares of all the surrounding men, knights and soldiers alike. Before long, Suimei joined them.

"...You know what? Forget it. You're better off staying stuck here forever."

Jealousy. Pure, unadulterated jealousy. It was stupid, but he couldn't help but feel that way. The feeling wracking him likely had the surrounding soldiers in its grip as well.

Truthfully, though, his words were unnecessary. He knew that Reiji had no intentions of spending the rest of his life in this world living a rose-colored life. As Suimei mused to himself, a question from Reiji interrupted his thoughts.

"Did you say something, Suimei?"

"N-no, definitely not."

"...? If you say so," Reiji replied, puzzled.

As far as he was concerned, figuring out the feelings of the others in this situation – either the women or the men – wasn't something he'd ever be able to do.

With that, the chariot took the three, one with a look of incomprehension, with two at his side with joyous expressions, away from Suimei.

...At long last, the sound of the city gates opening filled the air. Music played, and applause and cheers heralded the departure of Reiji and the others.

As the gates closed, Suimei stood alone, as if he'd been left behind. Well, to be honest, that was precisely what had happened, but it was something he'd chosen for himself. The sorrow and loneliness filling him were the consequence of that choice.

"They left, huh..." he muttered as he stared blankly.

Wanting to return home, needing to go home, turning his back on

danger... had that choice been wrong? As he watched his friends vanish, heading straight into danger, that thought crossed his mind.

—After this, he'd be walking down his own path, different from the one they had taken. Weakness could not be allowed. Such thoughts were out of line for one belonging to the Magician's Society.

That said, he still couldn't see a decision to walk down the path leading to the Maou as a good one.

The proposition had clearly yet to be completed; it'd be all in vain if he never went home. There were assignments he had to fulfill, people he had to save. Given the responsibilities he already had to bear, turning his back on the needs of this world wasn't too much to ask. However, that reasoning seemed but hollow excuses in the face of those who had just departed.

" ... "

As he deliberated, he gazed upward.

Images of the people important to him seemed to appear in the azure sky.

The one who had raised him and taught him magic, his father who had stumbled along the path of magic.

The head of the Magician's Society, always shoving impossible problems his way.

Caught in Ludwig's curse, an azure shadow of a young girl.

The stubborn vanguard of the Knights of the Rose Cross.

The footsteps he'd left behind at the nearby dojo with his childhood friend.

His choice had been purely a selfish one; this he understood very well. And yet, faced with the figures that appeared in his mind he knew that this was already the only choice left to him.

Chapter 12: Appearances Are Important

A few days had passed since Reiji and the others had left. Traveling alone, and having already confirmed his plans for the day, Suimei left Camelia Palace.

When the others had left the palace, their departure had been met with great fanfare and been accompanied by a parade; Suimei's only companion, however, was silence. That was to be expected, though. Before he'd left, he'd said his farewells to Aster's King, King Almadiyauss, and Felmenia, before silently making his way to the capital of Mehter.

"I never thought he'd provide me with some funds..." he mumbled hesitantly, hefting the pouch in his hands. The sound of metallic clinking could be heard as the bag shook. As Suimei had prepared to leave the castle, Chancellor Gress had handed him this pouch, within which some 20-odd coins were stored.

This had happened just before he'd set out. The chancellor had informed him in no uncertain terms that he should thank the king for his generosity, open disdain in his eyes. After a long-winded and mind-numbing speech, this small bag had been forced into his hands like a divorce settlement and he'd been speedily driven from the palace.

Judging from the chancellor's words, Suimei determined that this had been the King's idea, and that he had ordered the chancellor here in secret.

At this unexpected turn of events, Suimei could only scratch his head weakly.

I was pretty explicit about not needing anything. Isn't this just the King putting me in his debt...

Despite his having protested quite adamantly against any assistance during their discussion in the audience room, he'd nonetheless had some idea that they'd try to assist him somehow. As far as the King was concerned, this wasn't likely part of a scheme or anything, but rather purely out of his good will. Be that as it may, when it came to the "debt" he'd incurred with this favor, Suimei would have preferred to do without. It had not made him happy.

When it came to debts of favors, having someone in your debt gave you the right to call in a favor when you needed help. This had forcefully created a tie between him and the Aster Kingdom. Although he'd never say it out loud, that it had been a fairly underhanded thing to do was indisputable.

The goal had been to take advantage of his goodwill and conscience, to ensure that future dealings with him would be smoother. As the saying went, favors aren't done for others, they're done for yourself.

"Ha... What a nasty trick. Then again, I guess if he couldn't do this much, he wouldn't be fit to be the king of a nation..."

Suimei had considered returning the gift on the spot, but the King had foreseen this, knowing that if he did not show himself, but rather entrusted the task to one of his officials, then Suimei would find it hard to

do so. Indeed, if he'd rejected the King's gift to the face of that chancellor with the parted hair, then there would definitely be grave consequences once he'd left the safety of the palace. His desire was to remain as low-key as possible, and depart from the palace in peace. For that reason, he'd had no choice but to quietly accept the gift.

Of course, if the purse had come with strings attached, he'd have had a reason to decline. As it categorically had not, however, finding a reason to say no had been hard, all the more so because it had been money, something he would need a great deal of in the days ahead.

From transportation to lodging fees, from magical components to food, money was necessary for a countless number of things. The more money he had, the better. In his current situation, that was indisputably a major weakness of his. As he weighed the pros and cons, he had, in the end, taken the money.

In any event, an owed favor was still far from an actual obligation. The other party would, in the end, have to rely on his willingness to repay the favor out of good conscience. No matter what were to happen or what were to be asked, if he really didn't want to do it, then that would be the end of it.

The only problem was... he wasn't sure whether he was capable of something so cold and calculating.

...Suimei's gaze fell upon the letter that had come with the pouch. On the top-quality paper was written the King's hopes that, no matter what, he would accept this sign of goodwill, words that surprised him. Moved by the words on the paper, Suimei sighed.

After this, or rather, because of this, he'd have to show his gratitude for the King. Turning to face the palace, now off in the distance, he bowed his head once more in respect.

"You old fox."

Although, as expected, that wasn't nearly enough to dispel his poor mood entirely.



"...Alright, I should look pretty normal with this now."

After leaving the palace, Suimei's first stop had been a clothing store. Confirming that he'd successfully passed for a member of the populace, he finally relaxed.

His thoughts had been straightforward.

In this Medieval-era European-like city, his school uniform had stood out like a sore thumb. This was not something that had occurred to him only after setting foot in the city, but rather a necessity he'd foreseen ahead of time. Although for Reiji and Mizuki, modern clothing was almost something like the symbol of their status as heroes, for Suimei, who desired to live from today on as a normal member of society, his school uniform was far too conspicuous. While the need for him to don his modern clothing might later arise, for the purposes of daily life, it was better not to do so.

And so the acquisition of normal clothing had become a top priority, which had led Suimei directly to a clothing store. Although he'd successfully managed to sell the textbooks he'd brought from his own world, he'd spent the gold coins he'd received from the king, changing them to silver.

He hadn't bothered concerning himself with price, instead prioritizing dressing up in the same manner as others of his age, resulting in his current appearance. As might be expected, the clothing he'd purchased did not fit him nearly as well as modern clothing, not to mention the material was considerably stiffer. It was probably impossible to find anything that would fit him that well here.

That aside, thanks to his new change of clothes, he didn't have to worry about standing out too much anymore.

"Right then. Next up is the adventurer's guild..."

Verifying the feel of his sleeves, he set off for the adventurer's guild.

The reason the adventurer's guild fell next in priority after the clothing store was because he'd decided that the need for proper identification was imperative. After registering with the guild, he'd be able to obtain an adventurer's status, something that he needed given his current circumstances.

Although he thought nothing of leaving the palace and surviving by his lonesome, this would allow him to switch his status from that of a guest in the palace to that of a vagabond.

He was, after all, from another world altogether. Although he could pretend to be a traveler from abroad, he would nonetheless be suspicious to those around him as a person of unclear identity. That could be very inconvenient for him. Purchase of food, clothing, and lodging were the best examples. When it came to the role identification played in daily life, this fantasy world was no different from the more modern one from which he'd come. If he were caught without a valid form of identification – the only tangible way to verify someone's identity at a glance – it was possible that situations might arise that would prove far more dangerous than they would in his world.

Of course Suimei, as a magician, was in possession of magic that could allow him to lie his way through many a problem should the occasion require, but piling up lies one on top of another could land him in a predicament of his own creation should something unfortunate and unforeseen occur.

Alternatively, it was possible to obtain government ID from the nearby municipal office for a small fee, but as Suimei had no intentions of staying in the area, he had rejected such an option out of hand.

Even though he'd already decided to leave Aster, and thus acquiring ID wasn't an immediate need, but seeing as it was something he'd need no matter where he went, he'd decided that getting one as soon as possible was still the wiser decision.

Additionally, were he to join the adventurer's guild here in Aster, given the relationship between Aster and Nelferia, his guild membership would automatically be valid in Nelferia as well.

Finally, among the information he'd gleaned from the books in the palace library, he'd learned that the adventurer's guild was a rather unique existence among guilds – they accepted anyone and everyone.

When it came to other guilds, particularly crafting guilds – the merchant's guild, for example, which existed to preserve commodity prices and establish trade routes – created by those who belonged to a specific craft, commissions dealt with the provision of needed materials. Most of these thus had entrance requirements, necessitating either prior experience in the field or a guarantor.

The adventurer's guild, however, operated by different rules. Stated rather bluntly, even someone without so much as a penny to their name could easily join the guild; as long as you could handle the work, nothing else mattered.

That notwithstanding, the adventurer's guild was not to be taken lightly either. What mattered most to the guild was skill and reliability. As guild commissions consisted of dangerous tasks such as monster hunting or frontier exploration, trust had to be earned before one would be entrusted with commissions. As might be expected of such a place, normal people never visited the guild unless they had requests of such a nature to make. For this reason, those without combat ability would not be accepted into the guild ranks.

On that note, why would Suimei, a magician, not aim to join the mage's guild instead? Well, understanding that requires an understanding of what makes the mage's guild unique. In this world, magic and swordsmanship are together the twin pillars of martial force. Accordingly, magic is a treasured weapon when nation wars with nation, and subsequently, the mage's guild is an integral part of each nation's military.

More specifically, members of the mage's guild were only allowed to wield their powers on behalf of their host nation.

When it came to Suimei, both his magic and research were something that he would only ever wield on behalf of the Magician's Society which shared his ideals. He would never give a moment's consideration to doing so on behalf of another organization, and so the mage's guild had been eliminated outright as an option.

Moreover, in order to avoid leaks of intel, when members of the mages guild crossed international borders, they did so under heavy restrictions and per specific procedures which would prove an unneeded hindrance to Suimei's goals.

Simply put, the mage's guild was different from other guilds in that it was under the direct management of the nation itself. Obtaining ID from the mage's guild simply wasn't a preferable choice in light of that fact.

From what he'd gathered of what he'd heard from Felmenia and Reiji, who'd been under her tutelage, this world had no notion of magic systems. Magic was likely something they employed rather recklessly. Of course, there was always the possibility this was simply due to his unfamiliarity with their world – something which concerned him greatly. Unfortunately, failing a propitious encounter, he would likely never have the opportunity to find out the truth.

Collecting his thoughts as he walked, he soon arrived at the adventurer's guild.

The building was, like those around it, a two-story, wooden structure.

Erected before the building itself was a sign with a name, "Twilight Pavilion" in huge letters; the sign giving one the feeling that they were standing before a restaurant or a bar of some sort. Posted before the door stood two guards in plate mail.

Structurally, the building didn't really look that different from the others around it. If a difference had to be highlighted, it would only be that the space it occupied was vast indeed.

Cities in this world – Mehter not being alone in this – had massive, 20-meter tall walls encircling them to prevent attack from both invaders and monsters. Thus, the amount of space allotted a city was fixed and consequently buildings were small and thin, and typically two or three stories tall.

With this in mind, the space occupied by the adventurer's guild was definitely an exception. Not only did it stand in a conspicuous location, but it took up far more room than its surrounding buildings. If this was allotted by the government, then the importance of this building – and that which it housed – was self-evident.

If one were to look further, one other drastic difference would soon become apparent: scattered all around were dangerous-looking individuals. There were those who looked like characters from a game or a movie, strong warrior-types wearing incredible armor. There were also slim men and women who, like Felmenia, were attired in mage robes. Some of the men carried enormous claymores on their backs, while others hefted vicious maces that looked like they could smash human heads like watermelons.

Were such individuals to be found in modern day society, they'd have been arrested in moments for violating the Firearms and Swords Control Law, but there were likely no such regulations here. In this world, weapons could be said to be a vital tool of everyday life, whether that be for self-defense or for hunting. Regardless of whatever weapon type a person might choose to carry on their person, a law restricting its use was unlikely to exist.

That, however, meant the atmosphere created was incredibly nerve-wracking. Simply a step or two in the direction of the guild made it feel like the air was charged with energy.

For Suimei, a member of modern society, the feeling was decidedly fresh.

Suimei walked toward the door to the adventurer's guild, Twilight Pavilion, taking in the excitement around him as he did so, arriving at the front door moments later. At first, stopping before the large doorway, he paused, wondering if he was in the right place; the guards, after all, had not said a word. Seemingly understanding his confusion, however, they gave him a brief nod and a light wave, and he entered.

Inside, it was laid out much like described in fantasy works he'd read before. Looking around, it was clear that it had, at one point, served as a tavern. Taverns from the middle ages were unlike the bars of modern society. Instead, they served simultaneously as both general stores and a meetingplace; mixing these two together resulted in the adventurer's guild, which gave off an impression roughly equivalent to an old tavern.

There's no way it's really just like this, right? Suimei thought to himself. As he looked around the inside of Twilight Pavilion, and realized that the image in his mind indeed quite closely approximated reality, he sighed.

At the front of the large hall was a reception window where staff received clients. Before the window, a number of benches had been laid side-by-side. A small shelf housed what appeared to be newspapers and magazines. Next to it stood a request board which advertised available commissions.

The majority of the space within was consumed by what appeared to be a bar. Numerous tables and stools littered the area, and oaken kegs were piled like small mountains. Restless, red-faced individuals poured wine and ale down their gullets, completely uncaring that it was still bright out.

This scene would have been quite a shock to anyone from modern society.

As Suimei took in the scene before him and walked further in, a sound escaped his mouth, though whether it was a sigh or a gasp of surprise he wasn't sure.

On the benches, a number of people were seated, awaiting their turn. Suimei followed their example, finding a seat at the tail end of the line.

As he took his seat, he noticed a woman by his side, and a rather stunning one at that.

Unconsciously, he sighed at her beautiful appearance.

She had brilliant crimson hair that flowed to the waist, a dignified face with two piercing vermilion eyes, and a calm demeanor that spoke of a noble upbringing. Her armor of predominantly white, dotted with flaming red, hid a soft and slender figure. At her waist, she wore a decidedly unlady-like longsword. Her posture was refined and yet sturdy as a rock. In all, she radiated calm poise. If he were to describe her, she was like a still blade.

Even with his meager ability in swordsmanship, he could tell that she showed no openings. Simply put, this was someone of ability. From her appearance, he judged that she was similar in age to himself, but the impression he got from her felt anything but.

Were he the more flighty type, then he'd already have hit on the girl by his side, but he kept his actions to a light sigh. Because of his line of work, someone as full of secrets as Suimei had never been in a relationship before. Conflicting thoughts crossed his mind. This has nothing to do with me, he thought, even as he remembered all the girls he was acquainted with, who all seemed to be troublesome individuals, but that wasn't important right now.

As Suimei waited his turn in line, whiling away his time thinking about trivial matters, all of a sudden the girl spoke to him.

"—Excuse me, but can I ask if you're a frequent visitor of the Twilight Pavilion?"

A surprisingly gentle voice.

Her tone had been neither hesitant nor rude, but was instead remarkably polite, which perfectly fit her image.

Taken aback by the fact that she would speak to him, Suimei almost reflexively replied in his normal manner. Struck by the feeling that that would be inappropriate, however, he answered her with the same polite manner with which she had spoken to him.

"Oh, no, not at all. To be honest, this is my first time here."

"What a coincidence, this is also my first time coming. I'd been wondering if this was the right line for guild applicants."

"I believe it is. If you look at those other windows, they seem to be for people accepting commissions."

As he spoke, he pointed in the direction of the alcohol-serving area. More reception windows like the one before them could be seen there with a collection of guild staff.

"Are you an adventurer as well?"

"Yes. I'm a woman who can't do anything else but fight. This seemed like the best place to come to earn a daily living."

The girl lightly tapped her sword as she mocked herself in a lively voice. As expected, she was someone who depended on combat to make a

living. Judging by her appearance, she was either a warrior or a knight, so this was natural.

The girl suddenly offered her name.

"My name is Lefille Grakis. If it's not inconvenient, would you mind telling me your name as well?"

"Huh?"

What did she say? Did she just ask something? The situation had suddenly become an exchange of introductions, and Suimei unconsciously voiced his shock.

Her polite manner notwithstanding, this turn of events was really too sudden. They were just neighbors standing in line, why were they suddenly introducing themselves?

Lefille looked apologetic.

"Sorry. Suddenly asking for your name must have come as quite a surprise, but there's a reason for it."

"...And what would that be?"

"There's no need to be so guarded. When I visited the Church of Salvation earlier this morning, I received an oracle from the Goddess Arshuna: to exchange names with the people around me," she answered,

half-sighing.

It looked like it wasn't just the person being questioned who was confused; the one asking the question was similarly bothered.

The Church of Salvation was the largest church in this world, one which worshipped the Goddess Arshuna. Back in the audience room, when they'd heard about the Maou, apparently intel on his existence and movements had similarly come as oracles from the Goddess Arshuna. A young girl like this had been given an oracle as well?

"Why would she ask you to do that?"

"I don't really know myself. The priest in Mehter told me that the oracle from Arshuna meant that someone near me today would eventually become someone important to me."

"And that's why you asked for my name?"

"Yes."

"Oracles, huh. They sure are fishy... Oh, no offense."

The vague nature of the oracle had irritated Suimei to the point that he'd spoken without thinking, although he hastily corrected himself. As mentioned earlier, the Goddess Arshuna had countless believers. In this world, blasphemy was a dangerous thing, and was likely to draw the ire of surrounding people.

To have said something like that in front of someone who was a churchgoer... Suimei was regretting his disrespectful choice of words when Lefille smiled warmly.

"Haha, I know, right? That said, it's better to be careful. I personally don't mind, but if you were heard by someone particularly pious, you'd be in for a loooong sermon."

"I'll watch myself. I was a bit hasty."

"That'd be best. However, it's not like I have any right to talk, having raised objections myself after receiving this kind of oracle."

"Oh...?"

Suimei blinked in surprise. Perhaps that "loooong sermon" she had mentioned had been experienced firsthand.

Lefille laughed again, mocking herself.

"Honestly. Having something like this happen after praying for so long... I'm running way behind schedule because of that."

"You have my sympathy."

"No need, I did it to myself more or less. The fruits of my own foolishness, so to speak."

"Let that be a lesson to me," she added as Suimei posed a question of his own.

"So that's been going on all day?"

Understanding the question implicit in his words – "You've been asking people like this all day?" – Lefille nodded strongly.

"Yeah. You're already the tenth person today."

"Wow. That's awful."

"Tell me about it. Once I mention the oracle, the predominant reaction has been to treat me like some kind of weirdo... but there've been a few who thought I was flirting with them."

"Ahh..."

Suimei expressed his understanding of the situation as she sighed gloomily.

Although he wasn't quite sure just what kind of weirdo they imagined her to be, but the other kind he more or less understood. If someone as beautiful as her were to ask for someone's name, then all men – not just those with ulterior motives – would likely think she was flirting with them.

That heavy sigh was an indicator of just how many times this must have

happened already.

"So, how about it? If it's not a problem, would you mind telling me your name?" Lefille asked once more, adjusting her posture.

What should I do about this...? To be honest, it wasn't really a big deal. As described by the oracle and her, perhaps this once-in-a-life-time chance meeting was really something more.

Just revealing his name would be harmless, so he answered.

"I'm Suimei Yakagi."

"Yakagi-kun, is it? Sorry for bothering you over something like this."

Seeing her apologetic look, Suimei shook his head.

"It's not a problem at all. On that note, can I ask? Are oracles from the Church of Salvation a common thing?"

"I don't think so. I'm a pretty frequent churchgoer, but this is my first time experiencing anything like this. It might be common for people more pious than myself though."

"I see..."

He replied in a tone of mixed interest and disinterest. So the Church of

Salvation has oracles about individual lives, and not just governmental affairs, huh? Is this all part of some greater plan or just a hobby of the person giving the oracles?

Although the intent was unclear – assuming, of course, that it hadn't been fabricated by the priest in the first place – an oracle was a product of spiritualism, a kind of magic that drew supernatural existences into humans acting as divine mediums.

"Next customer, please."

As Suimei was pondering the oracle from the Goddess Arshuna, a voice called out for the next customer in line. There was no one else left but Lefille, and so it seemed to be her turn.

"I guess it's my turn."

Suimei bid her farewell as she stood to rise.

"Good luck."

"Yeah, I hope your commission goes smoothly for you as well," she answered as she approached the reception desk.

"...?"

Why had she suddenly mentioned a commission? This Suimei would come to understand a short while later.



As Lefille finished her conversation, from where he was seated, Suimei watched as she followed the female receptionist further into the guild. Deciding that she must be getting interviewed or something like that, he straightened his appearance a bit when the receptionist called out to him.

He rose to his feet and walked over.

“—Welcome to the Twilight Pavilion, the Mehter branch of the adventurer’s guild. This is your first time, I presume?”

“That’s correct. Is it that obvious?” Suimei asked frankly, having been correctly evaluated with a single glance.

She smiled in response, and explained why she’d known.

“Yes. You were looking around with interest: that’s something that only first-timers do. —Now then, what’s the nature of your commission?”

Because the other counters were reserved for people accepting requests, the vast majority of customers at this window were here for this reason.

Urged by the receptionist, Suimei explained his purpose in coming.

"Actually, I'm here to join the guild."

His response stunned her.

"...Wait, what?"

"I said that I would like to join the guild."

She must have misheard me. Suimei repeated himself, unaware of why the young lady standing before him had reacted in that way.

An awkward look appeared on her face in response. She kneaded a brow with one hand as she sighed loudly.

In a tone both serious and irritated, she asked, "Um... This might be a bit rude of me to ask, but you do know that this is the Twilight Pavilion of the adventurer's guild?"

"Yes, I do. Is there something strange about this place?"

"Well, yes. It's full of many unreasonable things."

"...?"

Her earlier welcoming attitude had quickly turned cold. Why is she acting like this? All I did was say what I wanted?

As Suimei was lost in confusion, she continued.

"...If this is a prank, you had better stop before going too far. We don't have time to waste on pranks."

"???"

Now she's mad! What the heck? What's going on here? From what he'd read in the novel he'd borrowed from Mizuki, a short conversation was all that was needed to join the adventurer's guild. While it was obvious that reality would diverge from what he'd seen in a fictional work, but Lefille had clearly been led further in without mishap.

Lefille's experience had been extremely smooth, so why had he run into trouble? Had he overlooked something important? The books in Camelia's library had said there weren't any particular documents or qualifications necessary.

As he silently submitted to the receptionist's scolding, he searched his memory for any hint of what he might have missed. Suddenly, a loud, angry roar bellowed forth from behind him.

"Hey! Brat!"

"?"

Suimei turned toward the voice. Standing there was a muscled man with at least ten or twenty centimeters on him. At first glance, he seemed almost like a small mountain. On his back, he carried a claymore, and his

limbs were thick as tree trunks. This man was apparently a warrior.

Following up his roar, the man continued in an enraged, threatening tone.

"You little brat. Did you just say you wanted to join the guild?"

"Ah, yes I did."

"Is that so. Well, for now we'll just pretend it was a dumb joke. Get the hell out."

A word of advice, and an ultimatum. The veins in the man's forehead throbbed as he forcefully told Suimei to leave.

I have no reason to leave, though. Joining the guild was the first step toward exploring this world, something necessary for him to fit in in their world.

To that end, Suimei couldn't afford to anger the other party.

Doing his best to keep his calm, he countered, "But the girl just earlier wanted to join the guild too."

"You're seriously still talking? Even while looking like that, do you really think you're on the same plane as one of us?"

"Yes, I do."

That was indeed the case, after all; what of it?

If he hadn't had confidence in such a thing, then he wouldn't have come in the first place. If he'd retreated after the cold reception just now, then that'd be a different story, but he had no such intentions. Plus, he'd seen other magicians around here, so it didn't seem like it was because he was lacking in physique. Even if he was relatively slender, that shouldn't have been a problem. He honestly couldn't understand what it was that he was seeing differently from this man.

However the man, seemingly no longer able to stand Suimei's calm assurance was infuriated.

"Do you think this is a joke, you punk? This is a place for warriors and mages, not some moron who doesn't know the first thing about battle!"

"Eh? I've been through my fair share of life-and-death crises, though..."

Suimei was referring to the fact that in his tenure as a magician he'd experienced life-and-death combat more than once. As he spoke, however, something the man had said resonated with him. What was it that guy just said? Warriors and mages. That this was a place where such people gathered.

That part was fine. But as he considered how they set about determining who met such a standard, he suddenly realized what was wrong.

"Warriors...? Ahhhh!"

When he'd purchased his current set of clothing earlier, he'd used those around him as reference. It went without saying that these were people who passed their days peacefully within the walls of the city. They, of course, did not wear armor nor did they carry weapons.

If he thought about it that way, then were anyone who looked as he did to attempt to join the guild, they'd warrant just the reaction he'd gotten. This was a different world, and not the one he'd come from. Here, judging someone by their outer appearance was the norm.

Indeed, Suimei had made a terrible miscalculation when it came to how he was dressed.

"—Craaaaap. I bought the wrong clothes!"

His realization had come too late. Now that things had reached this point, regret was unproductive, for it would do naught to dispel the irritated, hostile gaze lancing through his body.

Chapter 13: Fight At The Reception Desk

Bathed in murderous stares, Suimei found himself in an awkward situation.

The formerly warm receptionist now glared at him coldly while the burly man before him was so angered that his body shook uncontrollably.

The other members of the guild staff, seemingly personally offended, gathered 'round. A dense, threatening pressure enveloped Suimei, this visitor from another world.

Uwaaa, this looks bad...

Suimei groaned inwardly. His choice of clothing had been a terrible blunder. If he were to be scolded for his actions just now, then he'd have to accept it. After all, this was an organization of people who earned their daily bread with their blades; that someone dressed as he was sought to join their ranks was indeed ludicrous. Not only did he look completely normal, but his clothing did as well. No matter what aspect of his appearance you evaluated, you would only see someone without the slightest experience in combat. Adding his smaller Asian physique on top of all of that, and it was only natural that others would see him as nothing more than a delusional child who didn't know his own limits.

However, in the world he'd come from – assuming an organization like the guild existed there – even his current appearance wouldn't have created the predicament he now found himself in. In a world that was home to countless techniques, skills, and weapons; even if you were small of stature, even if you looked completely ordinary, even if you were but a

child or one of the elderly, there was always the possibility you were hiding something incredibly dangerous. Firearms, other weapons, martial arts, magic even – when it came to dangerous things, they were without number.

Although it must be said that a sturdy physique and a ferocious appearance was an advantage of a kind, but it was hardly a decisive factor when it came to real combat, and judging an enemy by their appearance had led many a combatant to their deaths. This was doubly true when magicians – infinitely more terrifying than their opponents, who, outwardly, appeared the more dangerous – were taken into consideration. Compared with such things, the power of one's magic or the trump cards one held were far more important.

Suimei had made his decisions while unconsciously adhering to his own world's standards, acting in concert with what, to him, was only "common sense." This had become a blind spot.

However, there was no reason for people of this world to act this way, and so the oversight this time was entirely Suimei's fault. That notwithstanding, he wasn't going to allow a mistake as small as this to keep him from joining the guild. Registering as a member here was something that had to happen. Moreover, he still had to look for somewhere to stay; he couldn't afford to waste any more time here.

He couldn't just buy a sword and return, though; his appearance had already been seared into their memories by this terrible first impression. Changing his clothes now wouldn't change a thing. They'd just kick him out once more.

As Suimei thought hard, looking for a way out of the current situation,

the man's eyes narrowed angrily, and he spoke.

"...Hey, punk. You seem pretty sure of yourself, right?"

"You could say that. I did say earlier that If I wasn't sure of myself, I wouldn't have come here in the first place."

"Is that so. Alright then, let's see what you've got..." the man growled menacingly, as he reached for the sword on his back.

Panicking, the receptionist rushed to stop him.

"W-wait! No matter what he's done, this is still..."

"It should be fine. That guy seems to be getting serious himself."

"B-but guild regulations strictly forbid acts of violence against a normal person!"

"This ain't no 'act of violence.' Anyway, that's only against 'a normal person.' This brat wants to join the guild, right? Then he's not a normal person. That means giving him a little test should be just fine."

"But... even if you say that..."

The man not budging, the receptionist could only stammer a rebuttal. Ignoring her completely, the man prodded Suimei with a question.

"You're serious, aren't you? So this is fine?"

"Pretty much."

Suimei accepted the man's provocation, but couldn't restrain the sigh that came. It was unfortunate that the situation had indeed taken this turn, but given the bloodthirsty atmosphere in the room, the need to demonstrate a bit of force was entirely within expectations.

And so he began planning his next move—

Well, at least this isn't our world. Those Church bastards aren't here, and this is a world where magic lives out in the open. I guess I don't need to bother hiding that much...

To be honest, Suimei's thoughts on how he should approach life in this world had changed drastically over the last few days. At first, he'd planned on keeping his powers as much a secret as he had in his own world. But for these people, magic was a part of daily life. Were he to encounter another opponent who wielded magic, then magic was the most appropriate countermeasure. That it'd occur in a setting without a single bystander was incredibly unlikely. As long as he lived in this world, it was impossible to consider concealing his magic permanently.

Furthermore, magic here was seen as a miracle, a blessing from the gods. Those who saw in magic only a heresy to be destroyed – the Church – were nowhere to be found. Accordingly, any reasons he might have had for concealing his magic weakened considerably. His other concern, that his magic might be seen through and stolen, was similarly a non-concern

in this world. Given the woeful state of magic in this world, so unlike his own, as far as he could tell, no one even possessed the ability to understand his magic unless he were to expose its secrets himself.

Simply put, wielding his magic here should be quite safe. Anyway, if he were to successfully become a guild member, his secret would have come out sooner or later. In that case, revealing it now, as opposed to later, made no difference whatsoever.

Although in his heart of hearts, he would have preferred to keep things a secret as long as possible, but as he considered the circumstances, it was also true that the current situation provided an unparalleled opportunity for him to demonstrate that he had the strength necessary to join the guild. He'd end this predicament with the audience as his witnesses.

As Suimei pondered his options in silence, the man lost his cool and shouted.

"You playing dumb or something? You can't tell the danger you're in?"

"Well, for that to happen, I'd have to be in danger first, wouldn't I?" Suimei replied calmly.

Rather, he couldn't think how else to react. Calmly expressing that he didn't see any need to worry wasn't an act.

Although the atmosphere might be rather tense, but a pressure of merely this degree was nothing to feel concerned about. As he had

testified to earlier, Suimei had already experienced life-and-death battles on more than one occasion. He was a veteran of combat.

The feeling of pressure coming from the man was simply not on the same level as what he'd experienced back home. Going further still, when compared with the sheer rabid fury exhibited by those who believed in God against the magicians, then "open hostility" of this level could practically be considered goodwill. That didn't even include the feeling of being surrounded by military units armed with the latest in modern weaponry, nor did it even approach the threat exhibited by those strange existences they called Monsters, and the forces of nature they wielded.

In comparison, the easy-going threat he felt from the man was a joke. With that said, Suimei recognized that he had simply become too accustomed to horrifying experiences, and that it was for that reason that he felt not the slightest hint of danger.

I wonder what he thinks of me? Perhaps he saw in him an immature brat who didn't know his own limitations, an idiot that was unable to read the atmosphere in the room, or a stubborn fool who didn't know when it was time to back down. As it was standard practice for magicians of his world to completely restrain their mana as part of concealing their identities, it was likely they couldn't even tell he could use magic.

The man snorted.

"Hmph. ...I'm going to start. You'll want to block or dodge this—"

He pronounced the start of the contest. It was only at that moment that the others in the room realized that Suimei seriously intended to go

through with this.

If this were just a demonstration of strength, what need would there have been to announce himself? It looked like things had unexpectedly turned serious.

Though still inwardly conflicted, Suimei nonetheless focused himself.

—The man's stance showed that he was about to draw his sword and swing. Watching, he decided it would be trivial to identify the moment when it would leave its scabbard and trace its trajectory.

Targeting the hilt of the sword as the key to victory, he chose the optimal use of his mana. As if casually flicking a bug, he snapped his fingers.

"Guhooo!?"

In an instant, the roar of an explosion and a tragic – not to mention terribly uncute – cry sounded. The impact from the compressed air explosion threw the man's massive frame into the air only for it to come crashing down shortly after. His sword, the hilt of which had been Suimei's target, was flung from his hands and flew through the air.

The sound of the heavy sword dropping onto the ground rang out at the same time as the man loosed a pained groan.

"Ugh... When did you... S-shit! W-what just happened...?"

Unable to discern the true form of the attack that had hit him, the man gazed around helplessly in confusion.

"Wha...?"

The female receptionist, standing behind him, gave voice to her confusion. Whether she was shocked at the disparity between Suimei's true strength and her image of him, or because she was completely at a loss to explain what had just occurred was unclear.

The match spectators were similarly stunned, their eyes open wide in shock.

"Pardon me, but might I ask what just happened?"

"I used magic."

Suimei replied indifferently to the question posed by the cowering receptionist.

The other party seemed to have finally collected himself, and the man walked over with his hand pressed firmly to his head.

"Magic...? But I never heard an incantation or a keyword...?"

"That's right."

"You've gotta be kidding me..."

"I didn't do anything else besides that."

Suimei's reply was given without a hint of modesty.

Given the reaction he'd just seen, Felmenia's surprise made a lot of sense. To activate magic without either an incantation or a keyword activation was something nonsensical to the people of this world.

—Ceremonial magic. Depending on the occasion, it was known either as ceremonial magic or ritual magic: one of the forms of the magic arts. Although it was categorized as magic, it was nonetheless different from other hidden techniques, astrology, or other types of magic systems. Its use entailed the chanting of phrases with meaning, and required an exact reproduction of the prescribed motions and incantations before it would activate. When described by modern magicians, this form of magic was known as manual magic.

Magic that acted in accordance with predetermined actions and incantations was a very common magic system in modern magic. Summoning magic was perhaps the best example, and it was likely that all the magic of this world fell under this category.

What Suimei had just used however, was a magic from an altogether different system. The snapping of his fingers had been the trigger for this magic. Fulfilling the activation requirements was all that was needed to enact it.

Simple and common, once the magic had been systemized, it was extremely convenient to use.

Magic without either incantation or activation keywords was nothing to magicians of his world.

"Then, you're..."

"Ah, yeah. I apologize for not saying this earlier, but I'm... something like a mage, yes."

At his delayed explanation, a commotion broke out around him.

"A mage... dressed like that?!"

"I've never heard of a magic that didn't need an incantation or a keyword..."

"Oi, don't tell me that guy's actually an amazing mage...?"

...He'd gone a little too far. But still, all he'd done was snap his fingers, really. From the perspective of modern magic, activating a spell with a predetermined action was nothing special. Magic chanted while pointing at one's target or cast with grand motions did exist within his repertoire, but Suimei hadn't wanted to use anything so flashy, though explaining what he'd actually done seemed pretty difficult itself. He decided to ignore their questions instead. Having reached a conclusion, he turned.

Facing the receptionist, her gaze colored by surprise, Suimei shrugged.

"Do you believe me now?"

"N-not quite. Your magic was certainly undeniable, but I don't understand why a mage like you isn't wearing a robe or carrying a staff? Aren't those indispensable items for a mage?"

...?

"Hmm? Are those really necessary for mages?"

"...Well, no. Not really, but pretty much every mage uses them still."

"Then who cares? I'm not one to follow tradition just because."

"..."

His answer had been so unexpected that the receptionist didn't know what to say, her mouth open, but with no words forthcoming.

When next...

"T-this isn't a matter of 'just because'! Those things are needed for precise magic control or to ward off other magics, you know?!"

“Well, I do have something equivalent to a mage’s robe, but I don’t have any need for something like a magic staff. Now, when you’re casting something particularly complex, then of course supplementary tools are needed. When it comes to something as simple as fine-tuned control of one’s mana, though, then only third-rate magicians would need something to help with that.”

“Haaah...”

Suimei’s decisive declaration left the receptionist nearly speechless.

Is it really common sense here that mages always have robes and a staff? Because Felmenia hadn’t used a staff, he hadn’t noticed the latter.

The fact of the matter was, for ages now, the magic staff was considered a tool of absolute importance. According to the records left behind, this was a practice that originated in ancient Egypt, when magic staves in the likeness of those held by their gods became a symbol of their authority. Among the countless examples since, perhaps the most well known were the Celtic Druids. Even in modern times, there were examples such as Mathers’ Lotus Wand.

The differences between varying magic systems notwithstanding, the magic staff was an invaluable aid to magicians of all kinds, being particularly common among practitioners of the fire system.

That said, he indeed did not have one – the reasoning for which could be left for a later discussion.

When it came to the necessity of mage robes, items which boosted the defensive capabilities of a wielder of magic, this world and his former one were agreed.

In the Magician's Society, Western formal wear had replaced the robe. With its ability to defend against magic, it was something he had already prepared. Should the occasion require, he was ready to materialize that black-white suit and cloak on a moment's notice.

...A mage's robe and staff.

He didn't avoid them because he felt they were antiquated nor did he have anything against the age-old image of a magician of which they were an integral part. While it was true that items of such a long history didn't seem entirely fitting for a modern magician, that was hardly a reason to discard them.

No, it had been other modern developments that had led them to abandon the robe and staff.

Although they single-mindedly chased after the mysteries of the world as magicians, an ideal that ran directly opposite to that of the science-dominated world they lived in, they had nonetheless been influenced by that same society. New magic tools had been developed to take the place of the old. Walking the path of magic advocated by the head of the Society had led Suimei to where he was today.

The magic staff had become a magic gun, and the robe had become a Western suit. Timeless traditions were important, but searching for ways to improve upon those traditions and forge them anew was just as

important.

Nevertheless, that this had created substantial confusion was undeniable.

"I apologize. I hadn't realized that my choice of clothing would matter that much."

His humble demeanor as he apologized led the man to make a frantic reply of his own.

"N-not at all. It was my mistake for judging you too hastily. I'm very sorry."

"I appreciate your saying that. ...With that settled, am I okay to join the guild now?"

"Ah, yeah. You're a mage so I have nothing to complain about. She'll help you with the rest."

The man walked over and pointed at the receptionist.

Following his lead, "Is that alright?" Suimei asked the receptionist.

"Y-yes. Joining the guild is just fine. I apologize for my rude manner earlier."

"Mm. Don't worry about it. It's not that a big deal..." he answered the young woman, her head bowed out of shame, his tone betraying his confusion.

"No, I truly apologize."

The 180 her attitude had taken was a bit unsettling, but it was understandable.

At this time, the surrounding bystanders who had criticized Suimei earlier returned to their seats one by one. From the situation, it seemed clear that the matter had been resolved. The man again apologized and took his leave.

"...These are the documents you'll need to fill out. Please enter any required information."

"Got it."

The paper the receptionist handed him asked for some basic information such as his name and age.

As the form didn't ask for anything worth concealing, Suimei took the quill and ink bottle she'd handed him and filled it in before returning it to her.

The receptionist took a quick glance at the sheet.

"So, Yakagi Suimei-san. ...I apologize for my poor manners, but this is a rather unique name, isn't it?"

"I know, right? People are always telling me the same thing."

Suimei smiled wryly at her remark. He was Japanese, after all, and this world was roughly equivalent to Medieval Europe; such a sentiment was only to be expected.

With that said, it was true that this was something he'd heard pretty often. Even in Japan, "Suimei" was a name rarely seen, and he'd been mocked more than once for having such a "glittery" name. No matter where he went, it was a strange name... but that wasn't worth thinking about now.

"You haven't included an address. Might I ask why?" the young woman asked as she looked over the form.

Just as she'd said, the space for an address had been left blank.

This didn't mean that he intended to stay homeless, but rather that he'd planned to look for housing after this.

"I was planning to look for somewhere to stay after this, so I left it blank for now."

"If you'd like, the guild can provide accommodations?"

Although he appreciated the thought, he'd already made plans, so he shook his head.

"Thanks, but I plan to head for the Nelferian Empire. I'm not going to be in Mehter for that long."

"I see..." the woman answered with a tone of regret.

He wasn't sure what it was she felt regret over, but housing was indeed something that had to be taken care of. He'd go take care of that next.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, it's nothing. It's just that the guild needs to know how its members are doing, so once you find a more permanent residence, please let us know."

"Will do."

"Okay, Suimei-san. Just to confirm: you wish to be listed as a mage under occupation, correct?"

"Correct."

"Next question, then. Can I ask what your elemental property is?"

The receptionist's casual question left Suimei somewhat perplexed.

"...Is it a problem if I don't specify?"

"It's a guild regulation. Don't worry, though: we won't make such personal information public."

"I see, hrm..."

"Is something wrong?"

The young woman cocked her head, puzzled by the look on Suimei's face. That this question had been asked was common sense in this world. Indeed, back in the palace, overexcited at having learned magic, Reiji and Mizuki had mentioned something about how one's magical affinities were decided at birth. However, having heard this from two who were apparently capable of using every type of magic, he wasn't sure how reliable the information was. Perhaps this was related to that?

From the guild's point of view, wanting to know what its members specialized in was only natural.

At long last, Suimei, an awkward expression on his face, mumbled a reply.

"Well, I'm a little better at fire magic..."

"Fire, is it? But what you used just now was definitely not fire magic..."

"Uh, um... I can use wind magic too."

"I see. So you have dual properties."

"Yeah... Something like that."

Suimei could only give an ambiguous answer. It looked like that was fine for this world, though.

As he'd said, he was indeed better with fire magic. But that was only in a very general manner of speaking. Unlike the restrictions on affinities Reiji and Mizuki had described, he had no problems using other types of magic.

It wasn't like what they'd said had been completely without basis. Even back in their world, because magicians studied different systems of magic, there were indeed magic types they were unable to use.

He, however, was an exception. He was a practitioner of Hebrew numerology, or more specifically, the Kabbalah, which entailed representing all creation with enumeration (Sefirah) and formulas, and using numerical combinations to bring forth magic. Fire magic, water magic, lightning magic... even the reproduction of a phase transition such as the solidification of liquids was possible. As long as the proper procedure was followed and an appropriate amount of mana was used, then any and all phenomena could be reproduced by his magic.

However—

(Properties, huh...)

Only now did he begin to realize just how important a concept this was to the magic of this world. It was true that even from the perspective of modern magic, the doctrine of the four (or five) elements and the five phases was extremely important, considered to be the basic concepts underpinning the world.

Despite that, however, the notion of “properties” was nothing more than a rough indicator of the element to which a magic belonged. As an example, even though fire and water magics were strongly correlated, just because you couldn’t use fire magic didn’t mean you couldn’t use water magic.

The idea that elemental affinities were innate was a rather basic concept. Although, technically speaking, everyone possessed the potential to use all magic properties, there were still those which were considerably more difficult for a given magician to use. It wasn’t hard to imagine that there would be some which were out of reach entirely.

—If we take lighting a fire as an example, while technically people are capable of learning to use all tools, there are undoubtedly some who can start a fire with a match, but who would not know how to do so with a flint. Such a person could be described as having an “affinity” for matches, while being “weak” at flints.

When phrased in terms of magic, matches and flint can be seen as different systems of magic. A fire could be created by borrowing the powers of gods and demons; use of the Sefirah to bring a fire into existence, as Suimei would; through divination methods such as astrology or tarot; or the use of runes or onmyoudou; *etc.* All could

achieve the same result, but which method one employed was a matter of one's affinities. There are inevitably phenomena that one would fail to produce when working with a magic system that one was particularly weak at.

Thus, were one capable of using other magic systems, then being able to use other magic properties became a possibility. It wasn't like it was a certainty that one would be able to use all magic properties, but for Suimei, a modern magician who had encountered many, many magic systems, the notion that it was "impossible" to use all magic properties was really only a problem of this nature.

He'd heard of modern magicians who focused solely on a single property and were thus unable to use others. Thinking along those lines, it was easy to understand why the mages of this world were limited in their ability to use certain properties and not others. It was likely that the "magic" of this world was dominated by the same magic system that Reiji and Felmenia practiced. Even if there were others, they didn't seem to be large enough to have affected anything.

"By the way, can I ask if Suimei-san can use restoration magic?"

"Hmm? Restoration magic?"

Suimei raised his head at the abrupt question.

An unfathomable look appeared on her face.

"Don't tell me you don't know what restoration magic is?"

"Not quite. While it's not like I don't know anything about it..."

Hearing the term again, Suimei felt that it was somehow different from the term he knew. Perhaps it was just a difference in phrasing and there wasn't really a semantic difference? Anyway, when it came to restoration magic—

It seemed like it was a term encompassing all magics related to recovery magic.

Recovery magic was a vital—no, necessary, power. The ability to heal oneself and others after combat was essential, something that pretty much goes without saying. Back in his original world, the chronic lack of sufficient numbers of magicians who practiced recovery magic had plagued society throughout history.

He wasn't worried about revealing anything in this regard.

"...With regards to healing magics, I can use energy healing, alchemy, and reconstruction magics."

"Huh? Energy... healing? Alchemy?"

"Yeah. That's right..."

He'd revealed the magics he could use for the time being, but the receptionist seemed confused. Perhaps she hadn't understood the

terminology he'd used?

"Um... Sorry, but I'm not that versed in magic, so I didn't really understand what you just said."

...Right.

"Hahaha..."

Of course. Of course this had happened again. Suimei looked like he didn't know what he ought to say.

—Energy healing was a technique for healing injuries with magic. Sometimes it was known as healing magic or spiritual surgery as its ability to heal injuries extended beyond the physical body to the mind. It was capable even of healing serious illnesses and reconnecting severed limbs. Healing magics were all of this type, while reconstruction magic – as its name suggested – was for restoring broken objects to their original state. It was meant to be used on inorganic things, but to a limited extent, could be used for healing as well.

...The receptionist decided to put aside the issue of these magics she had never heard of, and asked something else instead.

"Um, what does restoration magic have to do with refining metal?" (Alchemy is "錬金術," literally "art of refining metals." As we'll see in a second, in their world, alchemy deals specifically with the manipulation of metal, hence her question.)

"Because magic potions are produced via alchemy."

"There are metallic potions?"

What the hell kind of potion is that?! Suimei retorted in his mind before continuing out loud, "...I'm sorry, I'm not that familiar with what 'alchemy' means here, would you mind explaining?"

"Oh, um, okay. Alchemy is, as its name suggests, the control of metal via the medium of earth magic. It's typically used in the creation of metallic objects, the processing of orichalcum, or the creation of the very highest-quality golems. The magic potions you just mentioned, Suimei-san, belong to a different discipline of magic, magical pharmacology..."

"..."

"...Suimei-san?"

"Sorry, it's nothing."

—The alchemy of his world had originated with ancient Egypt and Greece. It combined metallurgy, medicine, glass-making, and the chemistry techniques of the time into one enormous body of knowledge. With the development of a medicine granting immortality as its greatest goal, it was said to have amassed the sum total of all of human knowledge at the time under one umbrella.

Afterwards, coming under the influence of the teachings of Hermes and legendary alchemist Paracelsus, alchemy had gradually changed. In its

new form, the medicine of immortality had become synonymous with the Philosopher's Stone, and its primary goals had become the refinement of precious metals and the creation of homunculi and reproduction of matter. Understandably, it had become one of the major schools of magic. Because this world had never had a Hermes Trismegistus or a Paracelsus, it was obvious that the alchemy of this world would be different from that of his world.

Metallurgy and the creation of golems could, at best, only be described as a corollary of the alchemy of his world. He was, however, interested in this "medical pharmacology" that apparently was unrelated to the alchemy of this world. Either way, it was clear that the alchemy of this world was different from the one he was familiar with. If he wasn't careful when speaking, it could cause some complications.

"...R, right. Well then, is it fine if I put you down as capable of restoration magic?"

"Yes."

After a slight nod from him, the receptionist set to writing down the pertinent information on the registration form. Then, clearing the air with a cough, she continued in a business-like tone.

"—Ahem. Excuse me. Next, we'll explain about the adventurer's guild, Twilight Pavilion, and perform a ranking evaluation. The details of the latter will be explained later on by the corresponding personnel; I'll talk about the Twilight Pavilion first."

Suimei nodded, and the young woman began her explanation.

“—The adventurer’s guild, Twilight Pavilion, is the adventurer’s guild primarily operating within the boundaries of the Aster Kingdom, the Nelferian Empire, and the United Sadias Autonomous Territories. The services we render are necessarily as varied as the commissions we accept, though the vast majority fall among one of the following: escort missions for those gathering herbs in dangerous areas, raiding ancient dungeons, exploring frontier regions, and the elimination of monsters. Any questions?”

Suimei’s silence provoked a question of confirmation from the receptionist. Up until this point, everything he’d heard mirrored what he’d read in Camelia’s library.

The adventurer’s guild, Twilight Pavilion, was a special guild with the ability to freely operate within the borders of the three kingdoms. Their headquarters were located in the United Sadias Autonomous Territories, with massive branch locations in both Aster and Nelferia. This was an organization with the authority to accept requests issued by the government itself.

Following along so far, Suimei nodded, signaling the receptionist to continue.

“Then I’ll continue with the explanation, okay? Now, although earlier I’d said that we operate ‘primarily’ within the borders of the three kingdoms, but strictly speaking, members of the Twilight Pavilion are not allowed to operate outside of the three kingdoms. Do you know why?”

The sudden question was unexpected, but not difficult, so Suimei

answered her directly.

"Because other kingdoms are either overtly hostile to the three kingdoms or otherwise view them as enemies, right? Subsequently, Twilight Pavilion members can't easily enter other countries, and moreover, cannot use their guild membership. Were they to do so, it would lead to dangerous circumstances. Something like that."

"That's right. That's why when you leave the three kingdoms, you need to be very careful. If you don't go through proper channels, then it's quite possible that you will be arrested under suspicion of being a spy. Although the relationship between nations has much improved since the demons have attacked, it's still best to be careful."

"Got it."

Something like that occurring was more than possible, and so Suimei expressed his understanding to the receptionist who wore a serious expression as she thrice reminded him of the danger.

"Moving on, our guild uses a grading system to record information about our members. The rankings go from E-rank to S-rank, with members receiving commissions according to their ranking. More specifically, E-rank members are unable to accept D-rank commissions. If you wish to take higher ranked commissions, then completing many tasks will improve your evaluation and allow for a rank up."

"And what is the evaluation based on?"

“While there are many factors, achievements attained while completing commissions is the primary criterion. That is, after all, the kind of organization this is. This much should be expected.”

Suimei nodded in reply.

Unsurprisingly, the evaluation of guild members' strength came down to work experience. There were commissions for things like hunting monsters or gangs of bandits, and so something like this was only fair. One would never rise in the ranks without others' positive assessment of one's abilities. Suimei had only planned on accepting suitable commissions anyway, so this wasn't a problem for him.

“Additionally, requests, for the most part, are announced by we members of the guild staff. Please feel free to look over the request board for a job you'd like to do, and then bring it to one of us. At that point, we'll investigate and determine the commission's suitability based on your rank, so please keep this in mind.”

Partway through her explanation, Suimei noticed something.

“ ‘For the most part?’ Meaning there are times when commissions are given by assignment?”

“Good job noticing that. Yes. Large-scale commissions which normal staff are unable to bear the responsibility for and commissions of extreme difficulty are handled in this manner. As befits the request in question, we will gather guild members and issue assignments to the appropriate individuals to have the matter taken care of. However, those chosen are either high-ranked members or those who possess special

skills. This has nothing to do with you at this point.”

“Perhaps,” Suimei replied vaguely.

Although even if he’d wanted to take such a request, given that he currently had no achievements to speak of, and had yet to earn the guild’s trust, it was true that such requests were not something he should concern himself with.

“The final item of business concerns your guild membership card. After this, you’ll be given a card which serves as proof of your guild membership as well as personal identification. Do not lose it. Were it to fall into the wrong hands, many bad things could be done with it. Please, keep it safe. If the misuse of your card causes harm to the reputation of the guild, you will be punished accordingly. Please be careful.”

“Will do.”

“One final note. The design of the membership card changes depending on your rank, and so during times when your rank is being evaluated or changed, we will need your card back. We apologize for any inconvenience that that might cause.”

Finished with her explanation, the receptionist breathed deeply.

“That does it for the introduction to the guild, next up will be the ranking evaluation. Please take a seat beyond that door there and await your examination,” she said, indicating the door in question with her hand.

As directed, Suimei walked over to the inner door.

Chapter 14: The Assessment Is A Battle... Of Course It Is...

Suimei, having been instructed by the receptionist that he was to undergo an assessment, took a seat in the hallway connecting to the inner halls of the adventurer's guild.

A lantern dimly lit the room, filling him with a deep sense of déjà vu.

—The feeling of a hospital at night.

As Suimei was struck by this feeling so unrelated to this world, while sitting sternly on the chair with his back straight, a staff member emerged from within the hallway depths. It was a girl with fluffy, tawny hair, dressed in the same guild uniform the receptionist had worn.

Before long, the girl had reached his side, and inclining her head, asked, "—Um, Suimei Yakagi-san, right?"

"Yes, that's me."

Suimei gave a frank nod. The girl's expression brightened and a gentle smile touched her lips as she introduced herself.

"Sorry about that. My name is Dorothea, and I'm in charge of guiding new recruits. Pleased to meet you."

"Ah. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance."

With this girl, both respectful and amiable, he maintained the polite tone he'd used with the receptionist earlier.

There was a world of difference between the way she treated him and the way he'd been treated outside. As Suimei reflected on the contrast, Dorothea smiled happily and spoke again.

"Oh, there's no need for such formality. Please speak normally. We're about the same age, so it's fine."

"...Is that okay? Wouldn't that be rude?"

"It's fine, it's fine~ This is easier on me too, not to mention it's my job to make it easier on nervous new recruits worried about the assessment. Although, I have to say, it doesn't really look like that last part applies to you, Suimei-san."

"Haha... Alright then. It's nice to meet you."

"Nice to meet you too!" Dorothea responded with great enthusiasm, Suimei having agreed to her request.

"Let's go for a walk," she continued, leading the way down the hall with Suimei following closely.

She suddenly turned to face him, apparently struck by a sudden thought.

"Oh, the form from earlier – I looked over your registration form. Suimei-san, you're a mage, and one with both fire and wind properties, right?"

"Oh, yeah. More or less."

" 'More or less' is it? You sure are modest. Didn't you cast magic without an incantation or even a keyword and send Roha-san flying? You must be a pretty amazing mage?"

"No, no, nothing like that. I was in a bit of crisis, so I did it unconsciously. It's something that only happens on occasion," Suimei answered, the smile on his face matching her own.

The aforementioned "Roha-san" was the claymore-wielding man from earlier, huh. He'd beaten him so quickly that he'd been unable to gauge his abilities; perhaps he was actually a person of some renown in the guild? Not wanting to draw too much attention, he'd attempted to hide behind a facade of modesty, but it seemed his actions had been misunderstood.

"Hmm... From what I know, though, magic isn't something as temperamental as you make it sound..."

She frowned as she thought hard. What Suimei had said seemed off to her. Her words demonstrated that she knew quite a bit about magic.

In that case, what should he say to dispel her doubts? He didn't want to

leave a bad impression on her, so he decided a suitable explanation was warranted.

"...Incantations aside, it's possible to activate magic in other ways. Moreover, the magic I used wasn't anything amazing."

"Really?"

"It's common knowledge, you know?"

This would likely prevent further inquiries. Rather than appear a suspicious individual who was clearly hiding secrets, it was better to give what appeared to be a plausible explanation.

Dorothea wasn't likely to dig deeper than that, and indeed she did not. Instead, she changed the topic.

"Suimei-san, you sound just like a lecturer on magic. —Do you mind if I ask something? If not by incantation, then how else can magic be activated?"

"That's a secret."

"Hmph. You're surprisingly stingy, Suimei-san."

"Are there really people that expose their secrets so easily?" Suimei replied with a shrug.

Dorothea seemed to accept that answer.

"I guess that's true," she said, before switching topics yet again. "...I have to say, though... While Roha-san is definitely a rather impulsive person, but sudden incidents like the one earlier sure have been happening a lot more lately."

Dorothea's remark seemed intended to alleviate some of the blame Suimei may have placed on the guild staff. This led Suimei to ask a question of his own.

"...There are really that many people who play pranks?"

"Yeah, there really are. There are those who approach the reception window dreaming of the adventurer's life despite not having the least bit of combat ability, as well as more unpleasant types who only care about the advantages of guild membership. I think it might be due to the Hero's appearance, but starting from three days ago, there's been a lot more of them."

It seemed like this had caused a lot of trouble for guild staff, causing Dorothea to sigh heavily as they walked. For humanity, disheartened as it was in the wake of the fall of Noxeas at the hands of the demons, the summoning of the Hero had been like a shot in the arm. He wasn't quite sure what most people thought of the Hero, but if their feelings were anything like those in the city, then lack of evidence notwithstanding, they likely viewed his existence as the symbol of their victory. Indeed, they had likely been inspired to think that with a little effort, they could do anything. For that reason, a number of people had likely been "infected" to the point that they'd lost sight of reality and begun to think that will could take the place of ability.

It had been this rabid enthusiasm that had caused the incident earlier.

"Does that mean I'm going to run into people like that where we're going?"

In his mind, he envisioned a crowd of chuunibyou-suffers gathered together.

"Nope. You're the last person left to be evaluated today. Everyone else has finished already."

"...I see."

"Something strange about that?"

"...No, it's nothing. Nothing at all."

Suimei waved off the issue before the puzzled Dorothea, prompting her to change the topic yet again.

"Oh, that reminds me, Suimei-san. Did you happen to see the Hero during the parade?"

"Well, I guess you could say that..."

Or rather, the sight of that face had been a daily occurrence for him

before – but it went without saying that this was something that ought not be shared.

Dorothea seemed admiring.

“Reiji-sama, right? He really has just this indescribable aura to him, as expected of one called Hero. From what I’ve heard, every generation of Hero seems like they just about embody courage and justice.”

As she spoke, she suddenly stopped and closed her eyes, an expression of yearning on her face. She must have been reliving the moment of the parade.

Within the figure of the Hero that had burned itself into her memory, had she found hope? Since Suimei had spent his days by Reiji and Mizuki’s side, he’d had no such feeling, but perhaps things weren’t the same for Dorothea and others like her.

Suimei asked another question of her, whose attitude toward the Hero was perhaps representative of the people.

“Dorothea, do you really think the Hero will destroy the Maou and his armies?”

“If the fabled power of the legendary Hero is real, then I don’t think that should be a problem.”

“What do the stories say?”

His follow-up question prompted a look of surprise from Dorothea, and her eyes opened wide.

"You don't know yourself, Suimei-san?"

"Unfortunately not, I'm sorry to say."

This wasn't something that Suimei actually felt sorry for, but he decided that an apologetic tone was the right one to take for the time being. Legends about the Hero were obviously something commonly handed down by the people. Watching Dorothea's reaction, Suimei felt that perhaps the stories of the Hero were as near to the hearts of the people as the legends and fairytales of his own.

"...How unexpected," she replied, her sentiment not unexpected, before beginning to explain. "The strength of the one called Hero is something that can be found both in the history books as well as the legends passed down among our people. Throughout history, there have been a number of times when the world has faced a dire crisis, and the people of the world have responded by summoning a Hero. The Hero in battle is a glorious sight. The stories include tales of past Heroes cutting giants as tall as mountains in two with a single strike, using flying magic to chase after mad despots, or cutting down the black, beast-like Maou with a holy sword."

"Haa—"

Her words piqued his interest, not just for their own sake, but because they also spoke something of Reiji and Mizuki's situation. It was only

natural that he would be interested, really. He would have to investigate more thoroughly later on.

"And what do you think, Suimei-san?"

"Hmm?"

The sudden question had caught him off guard. Essentially suggesting that it was his turn to speak, she continued.

"About the Hero and the Maou suppression force. Do you think they can do it, Suimei-san?"

"...That's a good question. If the current Hero is really like those in the stories you mentioned, then it should be possible. The problem is whether or not that matches the current reality."

"Do you think they can do it?" my ass. Reiji and the others definitely can't do those kinds of things, so there's no way things will go as smoothly as they do in those stories.

"Oh, you don't agree?"

"No, it's not that. More specifically, I think it's naive to presume that victory will come simply because the Hero exists. Whether or not they will succeed is not something anyone can know for certain..."

Suimei, as one with a precise understanding of the current situation,

was rather uneasy. If one truly believed that receiving an enormous power was enough to guarantee victory, that only served to demonstrate how little one truly knew about battle.

Suimei's eyes narrowed in worry.

"Such thoughts are best left unsaid when you're outside. If the believers of the Church of Salvation, who hold the heroes to be the emissaries of the Goddess Arshuna, were to hear you, you'd be in for quite the sermon."

"Haha... I'll be careful."

This again. Lefille had said the same thing. It seemed that to the people of this world, sermons from the Church were something to be feared to the point that they presented as a tangible threat. For the sake of what his goals, he'd have to be very careful from now on.

Dorothea's expression changed. Her look of reprimand was replaced with a look of agreement.

"That said, what you said is certainly true, Suimei-san. Indeed, most of the adventurer's guild isn't nearly that optimistic. Either way, it's a truth that the Hero's radiant appearance has affected things greatly. It's not just the knights or foot soldiers that have seen a rapid increase in applications to join their ranks, over the last few days, we've received several times more applicants than normal."

"And so the receptionist tried to get me to leave, right?"

"Right. Suimei-san, at the very least, you should carry a magic staff with you. Even those unqualified applicants of late have brought appropriate equipment with them, let alone a card carrying member of the guild like yourself. It's completely unheard of."

"Sorry for that, really. I'm reflecting on my actions."

If actions had simply not been thought through properly that was one thing, but this time, he'd also failed to take note of his surroundings, a rather serious oversight.

His head hung as he sighed inwardly. Dorothea stuck out her chest and spoke.

"It's fine if you understand. It's not like it was that big a deal anyway."

Unexpectedly, this girl had quite an insensitive side to her.

"—Even if you say that, that was a pretty violent way just to get someone to leave, wasn't it?"

This was something that Suimei had been concerned about the entire time. Even if you wanted to escort someone from the building, the way they'd gone about it had been overhasty, to say the least. Perhaps this was simply because Suimei was too accustomed to the polite service mentality of his own world, but even then, what was the deal with this world?

"You're referring to the way the guild staff acted?"

"Yes. Doing things this way could really hurt your guys' reputation. If others like me were to receive the same treatment, but not take it the way I did, then the guild could miss out on some promising recruits, right?"

Unexpectedly, she replied indifferently, "If someone were to back down just because of something like that, then we have no interest anyway. It's not like we're hurting for numbers."

Her response had been clear cut and unhesitating. Responding to the other issue he'd raised, she added, "Also, bad rumors circulating about the adventurer's guild is the norm."

"Because of the successes of the Twilight Pavilion?"

"Yes."

Her tone suggested she wasn't bothered in the least.

"Any other questions?"

Of course he did. About that which he could not avoid—

"So what exactly does the assessment involve?"

He directly bared his concern. In those novels that Mizuki was so fond of, guild registration for people from another world always involved putting your hand on some crystal that measured mana or some other

crazy thing to that effect. This world, it seemed, was the same.

As if she'd been awaiting this question the entire time, Dorothea's answer was energetic indeed.

"With a battle, of course!"

"Of course!" my ass!



Not long after she'd answered his question, Suimei passed through a set of doors as prompted by Dorothea. Appearing before his eyes was an enormous indoor training field.

"No wonder the guild takes up so much room. There was something like this here."

Suimei's muttered words elicited agreement from Dorothea.

"That's right. This is the largest adventurer's guild in the three kingdoms, after all. Of course we'd have facilities like this prepared."

A training field. Given what he knew of the strength of the guild's members, something like this was necessary.

But—

"It's empty?"

Just as he'd said, the field was currently unoccupied. Although there did seem to be someone behind the doors located within.

"Before noon, this second training field is reserved for assessment purposes. No one else is allowed to use it. Those who have already finished their assessment should be in that room there, finishing up their registration."

"Ah..." Suimei replied calmly.

Suddenly, noticing that the feeling transmitted by his feet was somehow strange – or rather, the entire room gave him a strange feeling – he looked down.

"Excuse me, but this material..."

"Good job noticing that. This training room was constructed with a newly-discovered, magic-resistant material. Even if you use magic in here, the building won't be easily damaged," she answered proudly.

"Magic-resistant material?"

"Right. It's still very new, so it's only in use here. Awesome, right?"

"Yeah. So something like this exists..."

Suimei's calm response completely ignored Dorothea, who was nearly bursting with pride.

His nonchalant tone notwithstanding, his gaze remained fixed on the floor. The floor and walls were, as far as he could tell, simply a mix of wood and stone. Could this really be the so-called magic-resistant material? Back in his world, magic-treated materials were quite common, but from his inspections, this material bore no traces of magic treatment. If its magic resistance was an innate property, then that really was something worthy of interest.

As Suimei looked around interestedly, Dorothea interrupted.

"As I mentioned earlier, the match will be held here. Suimei-san, we'll have you fight against guild members of our choosing, and your rank will be based on our assessment of your performance during the match. Is that okay?"

"Well, it's not like I have a problem with that... but, speaking hypothetically – just as an example – is there any other assessment method besides battle?"

"Hah... That's a bit of a difficult question. Actually, let me ask you a question in turn: if not a battle, then what?"

Yeah, there wasn't anything else, was there?

"...Okey-dokey."

"Huh?"

"Oh, I'm just saying that I understand."

Dorothea not understanding his answer, Suimei explained that he'd been answering in the affirmative. Even though Japanese translated without difficulty, apparently loanwords didn't work. As he ruminated on the inefficiency of communication, he raised his head to gaze up at the wooden ceiling. Looking back, Dorothea still looked a bit confused. (In the original, the term Suimei used that she didn't understand was "おーけー," *i.e.* "okay." I thought about using an equivalent from another Romantic language as it makes more sense relative to English... except that "okay" is essentially a part of every language on Earth by now >_> so I went with a less-known form.)

"Ha... If you say so. Now then—"

Just as Dorothea was about to continue, they sensed activity from the inner room. The doors opened and someone stepped out.

Having noticed their presence, the newcomer called out to them.

The voice that reached their ears was like the tinkling of a silver bell, a voice like a gentle breeze—

"Is that Suimei-san?"

"Oh, Gurakis-san. We meet again."

Looking their way was the person he'd met earlier for a decidedly unique reason, Lefille Gurakis.

Her bright red hair flowing behind her as she approached, she frowned at Suimei's greeting, a look of shock on her face.

"What brings you here?"

"They tell me I'm to undergo an assessment of some kind."

"...Huh?"

"Something wrong?"

"...You weren't here to submit a request?"

"Oh..."

Facing Lefille's surprised look, Suimei finally understood. That was what she'd meant earlier.

Back when they'd separated at the reception desk, she'd wished him well with his "commission." She'd misunderstood. Thinking back, now he understood the reason for her words.

Wanting to dispel the misunderstanding as quickly as possible, Suimei again explained his goal.

"Actually, I'm like you Gurakis-san: I'm here to join the guild. Oh, by the way, I'm basically a mage."

"I see now. You weren't carrying any weapons, so I'd thought..."

"...I'm sorry. Really, really sorry."

"Why are you apologizing?"

"Don't worry about it."

Of course this had happened. Talk about reaping what you sow. The words that he'd heard not so long ago struck me deeply.

Watching the two speak with familiarity, Dorothea interrupted.

"Are you two friends?"

"No, we actually met for the first time just outside, at the reception window."

"Oh, I see," Dorothea replied.

Suimei then asked a question of Lefille, who had just answered

Dorothea.

"Gurakis-san, how'd your assessment go?"

"Ahh, I just finished, actually."

"And the result?"

"Not bad."

As she replied, her eyes closed and she smiled valiantly. From the looks of it, her "not bad" wasn't a "I managed to get by" so much as a "I didn't have to go all out." She didn't look tired, nor was she breathing heavily.

Once Dorothea realized who Lefille's opponents had been, she looked simultaneously stunned and distressed.

"You fought those two and you can still say 'not bad'? Those two are considered real masters around here, you know?"

"Really? I just fought like normal."

" 'Like normal,' is it... Lefille-san, it sure is a pity you don't plan to stick around."

"...? You're heading somewhere else?" Suimei, surprised by Dorothea's comment, unwittingly asked Lefille.

"Ah, about that—"

"Sorry to interrupt you two, but it's about time for us to get started here. Is that alright?"

Concerned about the time, Dorothea's question drowned out Lefille's answer. On that note, they had spent quite some time conversing as they walked.

It seemed continuing to while away the time like this would create problems for others.

"Ah. I'm ready whenever."

"Understood. —Then, Raikas-san and Enmarph-san! If you would!" Dorothea suddenly called out, having turned to face the depths of the training field.

Voices called out in return, and two men walked out from within the inner room doors. One was a leather armor-clad warrior who carried a two-handed sword while the other was dressed in a robe and carried a staff in one hand, a mage by the looks of it.

Her statement seemed directed at this pair, making them his match opponents for the assessment. The only thing was—

"There's two of them?"

"Yes. Please select your opponent from between Raikas-san and Enmarph-san. Raikas-san is a warrior and Enmarph-san is a mage. Although their specialties are different, they're both very skilled, and either should be just fine for assessing your strength."

"Hmm..."

As she finished speaking, Suimei took the opportunity to evaluate the pair. Magical power, presence, menace. Neither one gave him the frightening chill that accompanied opponents whom he dare not let his guard down around. Suimei calmed himself and approached.

Suddenly, the warrior – Raikas-san, it seemed? – called out in a resentful tone.

"You're the new guy?"

"Yeah."

"Name? Occupation?"

"My name is Yakagi Suimei. I'm basically a mage."

Reacting to the hostile tone, Suimei's manner grew a fair bit ruder. His short answer caused Raikas to look at him with suspicion.

"Huh? What's that 'basically' supposed to mean?"

"That 'basically' is a matter of personal feeling. Don't worry about it."

"Ha. Is that so?"

Suimei wasn't sure why, but Raikas had been overtly hostile and haughty. Was this because he was in a bad mood or was he just that kind of person? His manner was decidedly crude. The mage Enmarph was the same. Although he had yet to speak a word, the air was thick with nervous tension.

Raikas turned to face Lefille.

"...You. You're still here?"

"Ah. I was chatting with them for a bit."

Raikas' eyebrows jerked and he spun to face Suimei once more.

His hardline attitude seemed to have worsened considerably, and he now looked like Nio.

"You know this person?"

"Huh? Yeah, I guess you could say that..."

As Suimei was trying to decide if he ought to clarify that they were

newly met acquaintances rather than old friends, Raikas voice dropped several degrees and his next words took on a dangerous tone.

"...I see. Someone you know."

"...?"

"You know her? Right?"

What's with this atmosphere? Looking over, Suimei could feel a similarly hostile attitude from Enmarph. What the hell is going on?

As he replayed events in his mind, an idea occurred to him.

Turning to Lefille, he asked, "Don't tell me... Gurakis-san, the two you beat were..."

"Yeah, it's what you're thinking. The two I beat are these two. ...This is pretty much because of me. Sorry about that."

"As expected..."

The answer was entirely expected, but Suimei couldn't help but sigh anyway.

Chapter 15: An Unavoidable Battle

Just what part of an encounter like this is any different from the hostile reception I got earlier? The number of people who had gotten mad at him as well as the reasons for their anger were in a different category altogether from earlier, and yet he felt like this situation was repeating itself time and again. The pair were openly hostile, venting their anger on an innocent victim, leading the victim in question – Suimei – to sigh. The chancellor, the receptionist, and now these two. Today was apparently his day to be immersed in hateful glares.

From what he'd just heard, Lefille's opponents during her ranking assessment had been these two. One was the warrior named Raikas, and the other a magician named Enmarph.

The ranking assessment was also meant to be a time when Twilight Pavilion adventurers could ask for pointers on battle technique. Originally, new recruits were to select a single opponent against whom to compete. Lefille, however, had instead fought them both one after another.

The result was obvious, and could be determined with a quick glance. If you ignored Lefille's slender sword and finely-crafted light armor, then what was left was a young lady with the beauty of a butterfly or flower. Given their poor attitude toward a girl of such nature, their loss must have been appalling indeed.

Dorothea and the pair finished speaking, their consultation having come to an end.

“—So it’s my turn now, right?” Suimei asked, somewhat rudely.

If they were going to treat him like this, then he had no need to be polite.

“Yeah,” Raikas replied.

“What kind of battle is it going to be?”

“The guild doesn’t set any guidelines with regards to that. There just needs to be a battle, and then we give our assessment. End of story.”

Whether because he found the question annoying or because he was in a bad mood, Raikas’ answer had been both short and sharp.

The grim look on Raikas’ face notwithstanding, Suimei asked another question.

“ ‘There just needs to be a battle’ – that means a straightforward battle should be just fine, right?”

“Yeah. The only rule is that real weapons can’t be used during the assessment. Since you’re a mage, that means you use a magic staff. Hmm... Well, if you have one on hand, just use that. Just remember that regardless of what kind of magic you use, you’re not allowed to cause major injuries or kill anyone. It’s not like you could do something like that with us as your opponents anyway, though. Ain’t that right, Enmarph?”

"...Not a problem."

In answering Raikas' question, this was Enmarph's first time speaking. He was probably originally a man of a taciturn nature, but the look on his face was identical to Raikas' – that of utter self-confidence.

Suddenly, an unknown voice taunted, "You say that, but didn't you just get your butts kicked?"

It was Dorothea. Surprisingly, she was a pretty daring young girl.

"Shut it! No one asked you anything!" Raikas roared.

A wordless rage could be felt emanating from his person. Dorothea responded by sticking out her tongue and scratching her head. This girl really likes to fan the flames, doesn't she...

"So? Who's it going to be? If you don't choose, then we're going to decide between us."

"..."

"And? What's it going to be?!"

"Well..."

...Maybe there wasn't really any point in thinking too hard about this.

From the time he'd arrived in this world until now, he hadn't really fought an opponent without magic. He'd seen Reiji and the knights engage in mock combat many times, but watching something and taking part yourself were two entirely different things. Plus, he'd thought to himself on more than one occasion that he'd love to take part in just such a battle. With that in mind, this training field match was the perfect opportunity. Lefille would leave soon enough, and that'd leave him alone with them. He already knew how he was going to clean up after himself once the battle was over.

Moreover, if he were to take care of things here, then he might just be able to muddle up accounts of what had occurred earlier, at the reception desk.

That makes this a real opportunity, doesn't it?

In an instant, Suimei concluded that even if Dorothea hadn't added fuel to the fire by making provocative statements, the end result would still be the same.

"Although this is probably asking a bit much, but... I want to fight both of them. At the same time."

"—Ohh?"

"What?!"

Lefille's interest seemed to have been piqued by his answer, while Dorothea shouted in surprise.

The expressions of the other pair, the ones he had just challenged, also changed.

"...Huh? You want to fight us at the same time? You punk, are you really serious?"

"Hmph. I hate jokes that aren't funny."

Unsurprisingly, Suimei's calm words only served to worsen Raikas' already extremely foul mood.

"Maybe if you had the strength of that woman, but a weak little mage like you thinks you can beat us? Don't tell me you let sending that guy flying earlier go to your head?"

"..."

Enmarph's gaze was piercing, easily a match for Raikas' visible outrage. Suimei had already anticipated this reaction. For adventurers as confident in their abilities as these two were to be challenged by a green brat blowing hot air, of course things had taken this turn.

However, they'd been showing him disrespect since the very beginning. As such, this was nothing more than giving them a taste of their own medicine. Perhaps an outsider would have seen such a choice as despicable, but he had his own goals to achieve, and in light of that, he

wasn't going to place that much emphasis on worrying about how other people felt.

Sensing the tension in the air, Dorothea, unable to control her voice, asked, "Um, Suimei-san. Are you really sure about this?"

"Ah, yeah, this is what I want. I have to go look for somewhere to stay after this, so I'd like to take care of things as quickly as possible."

"That's not what I meant—"

"You have the confidence to beat us quickly, do you?" Raikas interrupted, cutting Dorothea short.

"Yeah."

"What a ridiculous claim."

"It's not really that big a deal. Just like you guys have confidence in your abilities as adventurers, I have pride in the path I've walked to get here. Excessive modesty isn't good for my mental health, after all."

"...You little brat. If you continue to overestimate your own strength, then you'll be beaten to a pulp. Take back this stupid joke and choose your opponent. You can still be forgiven."

Raikas again threatened Suimei, warning him to take back his words. Suimei, having said this much already, wasn't about to give up so easily

though.

"No. I will not. And I have no intentions of seeking your forgiveness."

"...You'll regret it."

"I appreciate the warning."

"Hmph. Enmarph, we can't let this little punk look down on us like this. Let's crush him!"

"...Got it."

Suimei's uncaring shrug enraged Raikas beyond all reason and provoked a furious response from Enmarph. Raikas, meeting his partner's eyes, sent a murderous glare Suimei's way. Enmarph's gaze was no less penetrating. In this manner, the two walked over to the center of the training field.

(...)

...He'd been the target of their anger from the very beginning. That said, he had also ignored their goodwill, and stubbornly boasted of his own ability. By the time he'd noticed, things had already gone past the point of no return. If he kept this up, then eventually there would come a day when his actions would come back to haunt him.

The circumstances of where he was had also contributed to the current

situation. As a magician, he wasn't the least bit worried, but it was also the truth that the current situation was exactly what his opponents wanted. As men, they couldn't bear to lose to an immature brat. Suimei was distinctly aware of all of this, but he couldn't help but follow this train of thought nonetheless.

As the situation grew more serious yet, a voice called out from behind him.

"Suimei-kun. Those two are pretty strong. Are you sure this is okay?" Lefille asked as he approached the training field.

Is that because she's worried about me fighting them at the same time or because she's probing my true strength?

Suimei nodded in her direction.

"Yes."

"You have the confidence to face them at the same time?"

"Sadly, it's pretty hard to imagine given how ordinary I look, isn't it?"

As he mocked himself in answer, Lefille unexpectedly smiled.

"It certainly is."

"—You answered so fast! How cruel."

So that's how she saw him. Her blunt words caused them both to erupt in laughter.

"Hehehe..."

"Hahaha..."

Surprisingly, they seemed to be quite compatible indeed. The Goddess Arshuna's guidance sure is miraculous, Suimei mused to himself.

"...Anyway, fighting them both at once is in line with my aims. This works out perfectly."

"...I see. Alright then. I won't say any more."

Lefille nodded, before unexpectedly turning to Dorothea.

"Excuse me, but can I watch this from the sidelines?"

"Wuh?"

Completely and utterly shocked, something that wasn't even a word unwittingly left Suimei's mouth.

"That's not a problem, but Suimei-san, you probably don't want

someone watching you, right?" Dorothea asked, after straightforwardly giving her assent to Lefille.

"Oh... No, it's okay."

"If it's okay, then why does your face look like that?"

"Oh, this has nothing to do with that. I was just really taken aback is all."

"Really?" Dorothea asked, cocking her head in confusion.

Having received permission, Lefille nodded delightedly.

"Great. Let's see what you can do."

Lefille seemed fully intent on watching. His upcoming battle against both opponents at once seemed to have stirred her warrior's spirit.

His magic was about to be seen by others. Although he already knew how he was going to take care of that, he couldn't help but tsk inwardly even as he walked over to the center of the training field.

And then—

"Alright. Is everyone ready?"

"...Yeah."

" ... "

"I'm all good here."

Raikas pulled his sword from its scabbard and Enmarph shifted into a combat stance, pointing the gemmed tip of his staff toward Suimei.

As they had, Suimei expressed his readiness to begin, simultaneously pulling his Divergent Gloves over his hands and extracting a vial from his pocket.

Raikas, not comprehending what he was seeing, asked, "What's that?"

"Nothing special. It's just my weapon."

"...?"

Under the surprised and confused gazes of those around him, Suimei removed the stopper from the vial and poured its contents onto the floor. This was, of course, the same thing he'd used in the White Wall, the handiest of the magic weapons within his possession.

Because of the extreme novelty of the vial's contents, Lefille frowned at the glittery, silver substance.

"Silver... water?"

"This is mercury. You've never seen it before?"

"Yeah, this is my first time," she answered, squinting.

"Um, Suimei-san, intentionally dirtying the floor is kinda..." Dorothea said weakly.

"...Oh, no. I'm not dirtying anything."

"That sure is what it looks like, though..."

Under everyone's watchful gaze, he'd poured a liquid onto the floor. That much was undeniable, however...

"You'll understand soon enough."

"Hah..."

"...Hmm. Is that some kind of drug?"

"Nope—"

By the time he'd answered Lefille's question, the contents of the vial had completely transferred themselves onto the floor. Next, as this extremely dense liquid slid along the floor, he concentrated his mana, and spoke the incantation that would alter its form.

"—Permutatio Coagulatio Vix Lamina (Transmute, solidify, become power.)"

His incantation spoken, with the mercury on the floor at its radius, a magic circle spread outward.

A magic circle that radiated with a soft red, magical light.

"—!"

"Wha?!"

"Eh?"

"...!?"

As he operated his magic, four different exclamations of surprise reached his ears. They were probably surprised by his ability to construct a magic circle without drawing it first, much as Felmenia had been.

"Alchemy..." muttered Enmarph, the mage.

It seemed that he understood what Suimei was about to do. Under the direction of the light emitted by the magic circle, the mercury pulled and drew itself upward like so much clay, before finally landing in Suimei's hands in the shape of a sword.

“—This is my weapon.”

Sure enough, this had answered Lefille’s question. Suimei then focused, readying himself for the battle ahead. There was no room for retreat here. With his gloved hands, Suimei took up his sword of quicksilver and shifted into a combat stance, meeting Raikas’ doubting eyes.

“...Hey you. Weren’t you a mage?”

“You saw my magic just now and you still don’t believe?”

“Because you’re a mage holding a sword. ...Actually, do you even know how to use that thing?”

Raikas’ question reminded him that Felmenia had wondered the same thing. It seemed like the idea of a magician warrior was unheard of in this world. Their “common sense” reminded him of a game or a story almost, where magicians took up positions in the rearguard and warriors served as the vanguard. Then again, seeing as magic and close combat were two entirely different domains, it was probably natural to think that way—

“Well, I know a thing or two.”

“I see.”

Suimei smiled unworriedly at Raikas, who didn’t respond, seemingly fed up with talking. Seizing the opportunity, Dorothea raised her arm.

And then—

“Begin!”

At Dorothea’s command, the offensive began. Raikas’ first attack was easy to follow. Racing forward, he slashed diagonally at Suimei.

Suimei mirrored his action.

“Ha—”

Snorting in laughter, Raikas couldn’t see anything special about Suimei’s attack. The difference in their arm strength could be seen with a glance, just looking at their relative arm sizes would tell you as much.

Suimei could read from Raikas’ cold smile that he believed he’d obtained victory, but the final result was something that only he had foreseen. Just as their swords were about to cross, Suimei sidestepped to the left, let the strength go out of his arms, and allowed his sword to follow Raikas’ backwards. Seizing the opening thus created, he spun a full circle and from his new position, to the southeast of where he was originally standing, he slashed at his opponent once more.

“Wha?!”

Raikas’ reaction was a moment too late, and he lost his opportunity to correct his stance, instead being forced by the momentum of both his

body and his sword to stagger forward.

What had just happened was completely unexpected. It had been a marvelous technique which specifically targeted an opponent's attack and destroyed their balance, causing their attack to fail.

This move turned things around completely. Suimei didn't let the opportunity go to waste. With a flip, he unleashed an attack at Raikas' defenseless back. Raikas, on the other hand, was slow to react. He seemed to regret the price for his carelessness. Suimei, however, realized that he would not have the opportunity to finish his opponent.

That was because there was still someone glaring at him from behind, like a predator eying its prey.

"—O wind. Focus thy eternal power which crushes all before thee. Unleash thy wrath upon mine foes! Wind Fist!"

"Secundum Excipio! (Second bulwark, local activation!)"

Abandoning his attack without the least hesitation, Suimei activated a defensive magic to stop the progress of the enormous gale blowing at him with all the force of a giant's punch.

The magic he'd used had been the resplendent, golden fortress wall. It was a defensive technique which specialized in magic defense.

"Wha—!?"

A shout of surprise, its source unclear, entered Suimei's ears. Suimei, keeping his sword pointed directly at Raikas, had stretched out his left arm behind him, a golden defensive magic activating with his palm at its center. The cannonball of compressed air struck his magic circle dead on before dispersing without causing any damage to his magic whatsoever. Moments was all it had taken for this offensive magic of terrifying power to be rendered useless.

His expression twisting at the thought of his carelessness, Raikas seized the moment, pulling back and fixing his posture before speaking.

"Hmph. Your swordsmanship's pretty strange."

"I picked it up from a dojo near where I live."

Just as Suimei delivered his response with great composure—

"What the hell was that?! That magic?!" Enmarph screamed, his expression having changed drastically.

Taken aback by Enmarph's look of shock, Suimei narrowed his eyes.

"...My defensive magic?" he asked, surprise in his voice.

"I've never heard of anything like that before! You, just now, you...!"

"What? Something strange about it?"

Suimei couldn't figure out what Enmarph was talking about, all the more so because the latter was so startled that he wasn't able to speak properly.

The brilliant golden fortress was a type of defensive magic. It was a masterpiece of his own creation, designed to be effective against any kind of attack, an unyielding frontal fortification. That said, it was nothing more than a defensive magic, however brilliant; if it wasn't the magic itself, was it perhaps the sudden appearance of the magic circle that had so amazed Enmarph? No, they'd already seen him do that moments earlier.

So why had he cried out like that?

"It's not just weird, it's—"

Enmarph's shock so complete that he was apparently no longer capable of finishing his sentences, Dorothea took over explaining on his behalf.

"But Suimei-san! That magic just now, you activated it without a property?!"

"...Well, yeah. I didn't give it a property, after all. It's a defensive magic; adding a property would be meaningless, wouldn't it?"

Indeed, magical properties were meaningless when it came to defensive magics. If you wanted to stop an opponent's offensive magic, you had to suppress it with a defensive spell, and so they were an

integral part of every magician's repertoire. While some had debated the efficacy of adding an elemental property to your defensive magic – making it doubly effective against a magic of the opposite property – that would require adapting your spell to the one being used, something that took time. A moment's carelessness would spell your end.

Having reached a consensus on the matter, it was the opinion of the community at large that a property-less defensive magic was the superior choice.

However—

"That's impossible! Like something as insane as that could possibly happen! Magic is created by using a property as a medium! Something like a magic without a property can't possibly exist..."

"Huh...? What? Property... as a medium?"

What the heck? Suimei couldn't understand what they were saying at all. You can't activate magic without using a property as a medium? What the hell is that supposed to mean? A property is just a way of categorizing magic, not an essential component in using magic. It's not needed.

Although it wasn't necessary per se, but, perhaps—

"...Suimei-kun. The magic of this world requires the power of the elements in order to manifest. It's impossible to use magic otherwise. Or at least, that's how it's supposed to be. How is it that you're able to use

magic that defies common sense?”

Lefille’s added commentary was the missing piece of the puzzle Suimei needed to understand.

In other words...

“—Aaaaaaaah. Ha, so that’s how it is. Now I get it... The magic of this world doesn’t bestow an elemental property upon a constructed magic but rather requires using a property as a catalyst for creating magic. ”

With this, the question that had continually been on Suimei’s mind ever since his arrival was finally answered. Why did the mages of this world always imbue their spells with a property? This question had finally been resolved.

From the beginning, Suimei had always incorrectly assumed that the mages of this world were practitioners of nature magic.

Nature magic, incidentally, was magic that borrowed the forces of nature. More specifically, it was magic that reproduced phenomena found in nature – more than that need not be said.

From what he’d seen, the magic of this world belonged to this category.

And so the misunderstanding had been born. But finally the riddle had been answered – the magic of this world bore but a superficial resemblance to nature magic.

Taking the hero summoning magic as an example: were the door to have been opened with nature magic, then it would simply require using magic to invoke and then control the attraction force found in nature.

In order to call upon the power of the wind, pouring your mana into the air, with its infinitesimal mass, was horribly inefficient.

Or rather, that would be the case if you were using nature magic.

Simply put, because they did not do this, the magic of this world was not that which called forth the powers which existed naturally. If you didn't use the "elements" of which they spoke, more specifically, if you didn't directly borrow the power of one of the eight elements, then magic could not be activated. For this reason, the magic of this world always bore the distinctive mark of one of the elements.

Using the eight elements as a medium for magic could be considered rather convenient, and so it wasn't like the magic of this world was completely ineffective. That said, in pretty much every other way it was a problematic way of doing things.

...Was this due to something inherent to magic itself or was this merely a byproduct of the culture of this world? The answer to his former question had given birth to a new one.

"Having to rely on the power of a property – sorry, element, magic here sure is a pain in the ass. Integrating that into the magic construction process just adds unnecessary steps, not to mention the fact that it makes things way more complicated for no reason whatsoever. How

amazingly stupid.”

“What kind of crap are you spouting...”

“It’s nothing, it’s nothing. Defensive magic doesn’t require you to imbue it with a property; that’s simply inefficient.”

It looked like the magic of this world didn’t follow the procedure for construction used in his own. Instead, the stages of mana injection and spell construction had an extra step added after the latter – channeling an element. It was likely for this reason that incantations here were so drawn out, and subsequently, that others were so surprised when he used magic without one.

Even if this way of doing things was harder, it wasn’t something that could be helped. This was the fault of the originator of magic in this world.

It went without saying, however, that as a modern magician, what he sought was efficiency. That said, how was it that Suimei had had such a fundamental misunderstanding of the magic of this world?

...Including the fight with Felmenia, Suimei had yet to investigate this world’s magic. More correctly, he hadn’t had an opportunity. Although, naturally, the palace library had included books on magic, Suimei had not read a one.

Why? Well, that was because back in Suimei’s world, a grimoire was essentially a book of secrets. These were not books for beginning

magicians starting at square one, but rather manuals intended for those already capable of wielding magic. There were many different varieties of grimoires, including those that were themselves magic.

Accordingly, trying to learn magic from a grimoire was impossible. The basics of magic were never written down, and instead had to be passed down from one's master. Without this foundational knowledge, the contents of a grimoire would be all but unreadable. Moreover, depending on the book in question, there were even dangerous grimoires capable of eroding readers' minds or which were enchanted with magics of an indeterminate but deadly nature.

If Suimei had paid closer attention, perhaps he would have noticed that the common sense of his world did not apply here. If he had known that grimoires here were anything but dangerous, he would have long since studied a copy. However, since Reiji and Mizuki had studied under Felmenia directly, he'd instead incorrectly assumed that the grimoires of this world were identical in nature to those back home.

For that reason, Suimei had never attempted to understand the inner workings of the magic of this world. He'd mistakenly thought that understanding their world's magic would require a substantial investment of both time and energy, and that without a foundational understanding of this world's origin, nature magic, and the traditions via which magic was passed down, he'd never make any headway.

Instead, he'd devoted his time to acquiring general knowledge about this world as well as analyzing the hero summoning circle, and had foregone the opportunity to learn more about the magic system of the world he was now in.

Finally, it had to be said that, in his heart of hearts, he also looked forward to fighting mages without knowing beforehand what their magic was like.

He, who earnestly desired to personally discover the keys to mysteries he had yet to understand, looked forward to the opportunity to encounter new mysteries with great excitement.

...And that very same anticipation, which he had held on to ever since arriving in this world, had turned out with this kind of result: there wasn't a single redeeming quality to the magic of this world.

"...Forget it. Let's just continue. I'm just as shocked as you guys are, so that makes us even, right?"

"Tch."

"Simply put, your guys' magic is way too undeveloped, whereas mine is quite modern. That's pretty much all there is to it."

"Un— Undeveloped? What are you saying...?"

"Well, yeah. It's super primitive. Compared to the level of mysteries we deal with back where I come from, I can only say that it's so backward that I want to cry."

Enmarph was infuriated by Suimei's sigh of regret.

"Hmph. Like not needing to use the elements is anything to be proud of! That kind of thing, I'll crush it with power and numbers!"

"Well, I can't deny that that approach works, but... Do you really have the strength to do what you say?"

The words of an incantation met Suimei's taunt.

"—O wind! Focus thy eternal power into a formation of battle, a vicious formation! Let its strength leave all in ruins. Annihilate our enemies with its just power! Noise Tyrant!"

The incantation's activating keyword was "noise tyrant." In an instant, a whirlwind began to swirl around Enmarph, with similar vortexes appearing in his vicinity. This was very different from the isolated attack he'd used earlier, a formation formed of barrages using the air itself, boasting the power to tear down Suimei's boast with force.

However—

"Secundum Perfectus! (Second bulwark, strengthen!)"

The tyrannical tempest winds howled as they attacked in succession. Each individual strike far surpassed Suimei's compressed air explosions in destructive might, not to mention there were more than ten or twenty in number.

Time and again the storm slammed into Suimei's newly strengthened, even more brilliant barrier.

—Consecutive shots (Rush).

As the name suggested, within a moment's time, attacks poured down like rain.

The winds struck his bulwark magic, resisting for a moment before disappearing. This scene repeated itself over and over, though Suimei remained completely unharmed, his defensive magic as unyielding as a mountain.

Finally, the tempest magic gradually came to an end. It had likely been an area-of-effect magic, as smaller whirlwinds continued to dance nearby.

Formerly at the center of the storm, Suimei's bored gaze fixed upon the speechless Enmarph.

He continued to grip his staff, but could only stare dumbly in disbelief, as if there was nothing left for him to try.

Suddenly, Raikas leapt at Suimei, standing with his back to him, with full strength.

"Don't get too...!"

Gripping his two-hander, he flew at Suimei like a bullet. He'd perfectly timed his ambush for the precise moment when Enmarph's magic had ended, but from Suimei's point of view, his attack could only be seen as

slow.

Suimei flipped around, his arm hanging loose. Following Raikas' movement with his eyes, he activated his first bulwark.

"Primum Excipio!"

"Full of yourself!"

Sword and fortress wall collided, causing the high-pitched, metallic screech of metal scraping against metal. Looking more closely at the point of impact, there was the material blade that had come swinging in, and the immaterial fortress wall many grades its better. Neither gave way to the other, and sparks flew in all directions as they crashed into one another.

Nevertheless, Raikas' attack proved every bit as futile as attacking a real fortress wall with a sword would. The fierce collision hadn't affected the magic wall in the least, but the same could not be said for Raikas' sword, from which shavings had fallen.

"It's impossible for an attack of that level to touch me."

"S-shit..."

—Suimei merely stood in place, calmly awaiting the next attack while he watched his opponent's full force attack with contempt, as if he were watching a comedy sketch unfold. Catching sight of Raikas' dejected expression, he determined that it was a perfect opportunity to attack.

Seizing upon the moment when Raikas' abandoned his ineffective attack, he suddenly stepped to the left.

As Suimei casually strode forward, Raikas swept his blade across.

Suimei calmly adjusted his direction, watching Raikas' attack out of the corner of his eye as he activated another defensive magic.

"Quartum Excipio! (Fourth bulwark, local activation.)"

Blocking Raikas' desperate attempt to the reverse the situation was the fourth fortress wall. This fourth bulwark was designed to reflect any and all external attacks.

This fourth defensive wall's terrifying reflective power sent Raikas flying toward Enmarph.

"Uwa—"

"What—?!"

A flying figure, the sound of collision and surprise. Suimei wasn't the least bit moved. This magic, easily capable of fully reflecting physical force, had of course effected this result.

Before his opponents could rise to their feet, he began an accelerated attack.

“Nutus Multitudo Decresco... (Decrease mass, reduce gravity.)”

In a flash, the acceleration generated by each step had increased several tenfold. Under the effects of this latest magic, Suimei approached with the speed of a gale-force wind, but Raikas managed to react in time. Shifting his sword to his left hand, he prepared to meet Suimei’s attack with his right fist.

Not a bad response. Looks like he’s got some ability after all.

His opponent wasn’t the only one who could react to the circumstances, though. Gripping his quicksilver sword in his right hand, he stuck out his left hand as a shield.

“Like hell that’s gonna do it!” Raikas thundered angrily.

Faced with the heavy weight of Raikas incoming fist, Suimei had opted to use his hand to defend himself. Raikas’ angry roar had likely been in response to this action, thinking it impossible that such a slender hand could possibly block his attack. And indeed, if it were merely a matter of wrist strength, then Suimei had not the slightest hope of defending against this attack.

—Were it merely a matter of wrist strength, that is.

Just as right fist and left hand were to meet, Suimei’s gloved hand – originally inevitably set to meet the incoming attack – instead suddenly brushed past the attacking fist.

—Divergent Gloves. These were a magic tool that created a “divergence” with physical objects they came into contact with. As the two sides touched, they created a gap through which he was able to dodge.

Afterward, Suimei stabbed his sword into the floor, simultaneously grabbing hold of Raikas’ collar like a judoka. Combining the force generated by his opponent’s strike with the momentum generated by his forward velocity, he threw Raikas.

Without so much as glancing at Raikas, he changed direction, heading straight for Enmarph, who had just gotten up. Taking advantage of the momentary lull in action, he raised his staff, and desperately chanted an attack magic.

“Is that really okay? Your magic won’t have any power like this, you know?”

Suimei’s words pressured his opponent heavily. That Enmarph’s magic was incapable of harming Suimei was something they had already seen. The latter’s defensive magic had completely stifled his entire offensive.

Suimei’s words hitting the bullseye, Enmarph’s expression twisted bitterly.

“Hmph, even so—!”

Even so, he wants to continue anyway, huh? As if declaring that he wanted to end this with magic, his determination burning like a raging

flame, Enmarph began to chant once more.

“Buddhi brahma. Buddhi vidya. (Awaken, power, alongside great knowledge.)”

“—O wind. Focus thy eternal power and rage!”

The two spoke their respective incantations as one. All else being the same, victory would be decided by the speed of the incantation. However, Suimei was a practitioner of the Hebrew Kabbalah which employed the Notarikon. His opponent, on the other hand, was a practitioner of a magic system which required the additional step of channeling an element in order to activate magic. For him to try and compete on speed was the height of stupidity. The moment he'd made that decision, this battle had been decided.

—All that assumed, of course, that both spells were of the same level.

“Gale!”

The first to finish their incantation was not Suimei, but Enmarph. His unexpected speed was the result of a shortened incantation not even lasting two or three phrases. As a result, however, its offensive capabilities had been weakened considerably. An attack of this level was simply incapable of harming him.

So why had he used this magic?

The answer was soon apparent.

That was because the summoned gale came from behind his back.

Not too shabby.

As a chill ran down his spine, his mouth curved upward as joy mixed with a smile. This was what he had been pinning his hopes on, not magic battle itself, but what magic could push you to do. Suimei couldn't help but want to applaud Enmarph, who had thrown his all into such a thing.

That's why Suimei had chosen this magic. Its incantation: Buddhi, brahma. Buddhi, vidya. Buddhi, karanda—

"Buddhi karanda trishna! (And thus, abandon yourself to temptation's sweet voice!)"

—trishna. A term roughly equating to "thirst." This was a word from Sanskrit, a central language for more than five religions' rituals, and thus a fairly powerful one from the perspective of magic. Suimei had just used this in his magic.

Next, as if a direct manifestation of this word's meaning, a draining magic circle appeared beneath Enmarph's feet.

"It's not over yet!"

As if mirroring his fighting spirit, a flood of mana burst forth from Enmarph's body.

His goal: to suppress Suimei's magic with raw power. This could be described as a magician's last resort. When faced with a magic of an unknown nature, this wasn't a bad choice for a countermeasure.

Unfortunately, the magic Suimei had chosen had a draining effect – Kalavinka's Sweet Voice. Draining an opponent's mana was precisely this spell's purpose, in other words—

"Wha— aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

With a blood-curdling scream, the rate at which Enmarph's magic surged from his body raged out of control. Within moments, he sank to his knees, drained dry.

"Uoooooooooooooh!"

Raikas roared from behind. Although he'd been thrown, the fact that he was able to close in this far was undoubtedly thanks to Enmarph's assistance.

Not that it mattered to Suimei, who was unruffled. Gracefully, he stretched his arm out and took up the sword he'd thrust into the ground, and fluidly spun around.

The speed of Suimei's slash surpassed that of the flash of light reflecting off Raikas' sword as he attacked. In an instant, he'd closed the gap.

"Ugh..."

Just as his swing was about to take his sword straight to Raikas' throat, he stopped his motion.

"—And it's a victory for me. Agreed?"

Neither of his opponents had any room to disagree.

Chapter 16: Enticing Ultramarine

Calmly, Suimei removed his quicksilver sword from Raikas' throat. Raikas dropped to the floor, gasping for breath.

"Haaa... ha... shit..."

"Ugh..."

Behind him Enmarph fell to the ground, completely exhausted, a consequence of his mana having been drained.

Victory. Their contempt and ridicule had been returned in full – complete and total victory. Generally, upon their victory, adventurers would revel in the joy of triumph, but today's victor did no such thing. Calmly, he canceled the magic enchanting his mercury blade, allowing it to return to its liquid state.

Next, as if time were rewinding itself, the flowing mercury returned itself to the vial from whence it had come.

Dorothea, the guild's representative witness for the battle watched the two fallen adventurers in amazement.

"Uwa... He really beat them both at once..."

Her face was frozen in shock, so unexpected was the outcome. Her fellow spectator, Lefille, unsurprisingly bore a warrior's gaze. She watched Suimei with a fixed gaze, her unmoving eyes seemingly scrutinizing a skilled warrior who she couldn't be careless around.

Suddenly, that serious expression vanished, replaced by a gentle smile.

"...Magnificent."

This word of praise weakened the serious aura that continued to emanate from her person.

Dorothea approached Suimei.

"Suimei-san. What an amazing battle that was! You fought against Raikas-san and Enmarph-san at the same time and completely overwhelmed them. There aren't any other Mehter guild members right now that could replicate such a feat!"

"Thank you very much. But really, I just managed to use a few of the techniques that I'm pretty good with."

His modest tone, which implied that this outcome had been a stroke of luck, provoked a look of envy from Dorothea, as well as a retort.

"What're you being modest for? You're an amazing mage! Even when compared to the mages of the mages' guild, something of this level puts you on par with the very most skilled mages! Isn't that right, Lefille-san?"

“Yeah. I’m not that familiar with what the strongest mages of Mehter’s mages’ guild are like, but from what we just witnessed, your skills are definitely at a high level.”

Lefille’s words piqued Suimei’s interest.

“...On that note, if you two were to compare me to other strong mages you know, how do I match up?”

Suimei expressed his interest in the mages of this world. He’d just boasted that the magic of this world was decidedly inferior, although if speaking solely about how magic was wielded, that wasn’t necessarily the case. Truth be told, he didn’t have a clue just how strong the very most powerful mages of this world were.

If the conditions included a magic that was practiced and familiar and a large mana capacity, then pouring in tremendous amounts of mana into said magic would effect awesome results, resulting in a magic of such scale that it would shock anyone. Additionally, when the fact that elements were utilized as a magic catalyst into the equation, then the power would likely be even greater.

That, of course, was providing that this magic was used in battle—

His question seemed to make Dorothea happy.

“So you care about this kind of thing too, huh, Suimei-san? I guess you are a guy, after all.”

"Yeah, I guess. ...So?"

"Ahem. That's a good attitude to have, I think. Anyway, if I were to compare you to Twilight Pavilion's S-ranked mages, then I have to say you're still a bit weaker..."

Her hesitation at the tail end of that sentence seemed to suggest that he was on something of a level comparable to those S-ranked mages.

That being the case...

"I see. ...By the way, the renowned White Flame of this city – how does she stack up against S-ranked mages?"

"White Flame-san is more well known for her research ability. Although she's allegedly either first or second when it comes to raw power, but when it comes to battle, she's still a level lower than the battle experts here."

"Oh..."

Dorothea's declaration had been proud, as if boasting about the strength of the guild. Suimei voiced his interest.

Felmenia Stingray. Although she was a talented mage, her battle ability left something to be desired. Although her raw talent put her on par with the very best of mages, but her lack of battle experience put her a level

below them. Fascinating.

That was good news. It looked like it was still a bit early to be disappointed by this world's magic.

"And you, Gurakis-san? What do you think?"

Surprisingly, Lefille looked back at him with confusion.

"...I would never have guessed you would care so much about comparing against others."

"Oh, no, it's nothing like that. This is just for reference. I want to know where I stand, your honest opinions about my ability, *etc.* That's the sort of thing anyone would care about, right?"

Lefille closed her eyes, as if searching her memory, before slowly answering.

"That's true... This is just my opinion, but... from what I saw today, I don't think your mana capacity is comparable to the strongest mages. When it comes to destructive power, although I saw you use magic just now, I'm afraid I can't pass judgment."

"Destructive power, huh."

As expected, the mages of this world – just like nature magic practitioners back home – focused primarily on destructive power. That

being the case, just how deadly were the strongest mages here?

"If we're talking about those who stand at the absolute peak of magedom, then a forest or a city can be leveled with a single spell. I apologize if this is a bit harsh, but you aren't even close to that level."

"I see, I see..."

That was within expectation. Since he hadn't activated his mana furnace, it was natural that there was a huge gap between them. Able to destroy a forest or a city in one blow? While it wasn't at the level of flattening mountains or destroying entire peninsulas, it was still a pretty terrifying level. Then again, even magicians back home probably weren't capable of a feat like that either. Not that that mattered right now.

"Thanks a lot. I've learned a lot."

"It's nothing. Thanking me for something that small makes me a little embarrassed."

"Not at all. There's still a lot I don't know; broadening my horizons is necessary."

Suimei bowed his head in gratitude. Dorothea tilted her head, looking confused.

"...Honestly, just who are you really, Suimei-san? You're this strong and yet I've never heard your name before..."

"Of course not. If I were to be known just for having reached this kind of level, that'd be the weird thing, right?" Suimei mocked himself.

Dorothea looked displeased.

"Please don't look down on Twilight Pavilion's intel gathering abilities. Knowing the name of someone of your ability is pretty much guaranteed... well, almost anyway."

Her certainty wavered by the end of her sentence, admitting that there were holes in their knowledge. Suimei was a native of Japan, to expect someone from another world to have gathered intel on him was asking a bit much.

Trying to raise her spirits, Suimei answered weakly.

"Uh... How do I put this? Well, I come from somewhere pretty far away..."

"Somewhere far? The South?"

"No. East would be a more accurate description."

Suimei thought back on the maps he'd studied in the palace. Preparing for just this kind of occasion, he'd made sure to familiarize himself with geography.

To the east of Aster lay an enormous, desolate area that was a mix of

forests, mountains, and desert. There hadn't been any contact with kingdoms in the area, and almost no information on that area of the world at all.

Thus, when asked, it would be fine to answer in this way.

"Oh, okay. Our knowledge of the east is definitely lacking. Does that mean that your magic is something practiced in the east?"

"You could say that," he answered, with a face that couldn't be read.

Her interest having been raised, Lefille sunk into silence before mumbling.

"Unique magic, is it..."

"Something the matter?"

"...Never mind."

"...?"

What had caught her interest?

The look in her eyes just now had been strange—

"Yeah, your magic just now was pretty amazing, whether it be the speed

of activation or the strength of your defensive spells. The world sure is wide."

"You flatter me."

Being directly complimented in this manner made him rather embarrassed.

Dorothea turned to face Lefille, as if she'd suddenly remembered something.

"That reminds me, Lefille-san you're planning on leaving for the Nelferian Empire, right?"

"Hmm? Oh, yes, I am," Lefille affirmed.

So she's heading for Nelferia too? What a coincidence.

"Oh? Gurakis-san, you're planning on going to the Empire?"

"Yep. As preparations for visiting the Empire's Academy of Magic one day, I joined the guild."

"The Academy of Magic is it... That's definitely..."

The Academy of Magic. From what he'd read, it was a massive academic institution within the Empire concerned with all things magical. It

gathered students from all three kingdoms for the purposes of magic research and development, serving to further strengthen the ties between the allied nations.

The mere mention of its name should draw tremendous interest, but...

Not interested...

Whether it was research organizations or academic ones, Suimei wasn't interested. Although at first glance, Suimei, as a magic researcher, should be greatly drawn to such a thing, back in his own world, he had previously entered such an institution at his organization's command. At this "academy," he'd experienced no small degree of suffering before managing to fight his way out with the help of his comrades. From that point forward, he had nothing but negative feelings toward such things.

"Yeah. I'm pretty ignorant when it comes to magic, so I'd like to go there to learn."

"You want to learn magic?"

"Yes, I plan to study it quite thoroughly from now on."

Lefille seemed to be the type that was quite confident in her abilities.

Whatever the case, perhaps they would meet again at some point down the road. Not only were they both headed for the Empire, but they were even destined for the same district.

Dorothea suddenly sighed.

"A swordswoman of your talent would undoubtedly be able to make a name for herself here. Such a shame that you'll be leaving us. —At least Suimei-san's still here, though!"

"About that. Sorry, but after my preparations are finished, I'm leaving for the city of Krاند."

After a moment's silence, Dorothea screamed at Suimei.

"...Huuuuuuuuuuuuuh?! I finally thought that we'd suddenly had a promising new magician in you, and yet this?! Weren't you going to give the mage's guild a huge shock?!"

What kind of rampant delusions had passed through her mind?

"...Sorry."

"How did this happen...? And we finally had such promising recruits for once..."

"Really sorry about that. I have things that I need to do, though."

"...I see. Well, if the two of you have something in mind, then that's that."

"Yeah, plus my final destination's also the Empire."

"You too?"

"Yep. When it comes to intel, the Empire's the best place for that sort of thing."

"Is that so? Well, I don't know when we'll meet again, but please take care of me when that time comes."

"Right, same here."

"—With that, I should probably take my leave. Suimei-kun, I learned a lot from your battle just now."

With that farewell, she turned gracefully.

Suimei, something on his mind, watched her tensely.

"..."

"Is something wrong?"

"No, it's nothing. Take care."

Thanking him for his well wishing, she exited through the training field doors.

Suimei's eyes narrowed as he watched that beautiful figure disappear.

—If it's her, then this should be fine. She's not the kind that enjoys idle chatter, and she doesn't have any companions. Plus, she's the cautious type.

Anyway, she was bound for the Empire anyway. It wasn't likely that what happened here would be leaked.

...Confirming her exit, Suimei raised a question without ever taking his eyes off the doors.

"—So can you tell me what my ranking is?"

Unable to see Suimei's expression as he posed this question, Dorothea looked up at the ceiling as she answered.

"That, hmm... Right, well, Suimei-san, you defeated both Raikas-san and Enmarph-san."

"...Yeah."

"..."

At this, Raikas, his face ashen, looked away. Enmarph's face was similarly remorseful. As expected, two defeats in a row was hard to stomach. Watching the pair out of the corner of her eyes, Dorothea answered in a

business-like tone.

"Although typically speaking a C-rank would be most appropriate, but considering that you've clearly demonstrated a B-rank ability, then it only makes sense to register you as a B-rank."

"Oh..." Suimei said in surprise, this evaluation beyond his expectation.

B-rank. Although he was undoubtedly a person of some ability, he'd still been evaluated quite highly.

Her decision made, Dorothea revealed a happy expression, saying something that seemed to make her happy.

"That was truly very impressive. You've become someone famous in one go, Suimei-san."

"Perhaps."

"Yep, yep. I can guarantee it."

As she spoke, she revealed a confident look that seemed to say, "Leave it all to me."

Indeed. If a new adventurer were to suddenly appear with such a high evaluation, then his name would definitely spread quickly.

"It's just that—"

"...?"

That was, of course, providing that certain things happened first.

"—That would only happen if the three of you – Dorothea, you included – were to reveal what happened today, right?"

"...? Well, even if we didn't talk about what happened here, a brand-new B-rank would draw attention all its own."

—Exactly. That was the key.

As Dorothea stood there, puzzling over his words, before any of them realized what had happened, Suimei adorned himself in his black-colored work clothing.

Suddenly, a terrifying aura burst out from his body.

Raikas, the first to notice something was awry, stared at Suimei.

"...You."

"It's not a problem. I won't become anyone famous. No, during today's test, I was handily defeated, and was appropriately given a D-rank. This is what you will report. I will be remembered as a second-rate magician

without a single redeeming quality besides his ability to work restorative magic."

"—?"

His words left Dorothea completely uncomprehending, while Raikas and Enmarph were frozen by the tense atmosphere. What had just happened? Along with the frightening pressure being exerted by Suimei, he'd pronounced a declaration for them to follow.

And so—

"I apologize to the three of you, but I'll have you honor my request."

"Even if you say that, well..."

"Ah—"

Turning, he suddenly placed his hands atop their heads, and immediately enacted a magic without the least hesitation.

Raikas, charging at him to interrupt his actions, and Dorothea, innocently standing there clueless, were thus subjected to Suimei's command magic without resistance.

Because neither of the pair had any notable magic resistance, the result was obvious

His magic scoured the expressions from their faces, and their shoulders drooped, their stares blank as they stood lifelessly in place.

There was but one who did not fall under the spell of his magic. Trembling fiercely, Enmarph cried out in fear.

"...Why?"

"Hmm? Do you even have to ask? It's like I just said. I just want to be ranked appropriately is all."

"The hell are you saying? Rankings are a matter of the utmost importance to guild members. Throwing away the high rank you've attained like that... what is your goal?"

Suimei answered his question without worry.

"It's not like I have anything particular in mind, you know?"

"What—?"

"Doing things like this will let me avoid quite the hassle is all."

"Now that you say that..."

Enmarph expressed understanding. A high rank would lead to no small trouble, something he well understood as a senior of the guild. Moreover,

just as he was currently witnessing, this was even worse for someone who had no intention of letting himself draw attention.

"What I need is to accumulate a lot more experience battling the people of this world."

" 'The people of this world...?' "

"That's nothing you need concern yourself with."

It didn't matter who, there wasn't a single native of this world who would simply let his words just now pass unanswered. Suimei didn't bother to answer, though. It wasn't anything a stranger need concern himself with.

Enmarph was again filled with anxiety.

"Even if you erase our memories of what happened here, it's useless. What you did outside won't disappear. Dorothea told us what you did."

"Yeah, but it's not like anyone's going to investigate too thoroughly, right? This test will be the standard for assessing my strength, and the stuff that happened outside happens every now and again, right? Humans are the kind of creature that delights in looking down on others, and in the absence of undeniable evidence, would prefer to believe others weaker than themselves, rather than stronger."

" ... "

Enmarph did not speak. More correctly, he couldn't speak. As if the words had been stolen straight out of his mouth.

All he did was stare fretfully at the monster before him.

The words just now had perfectly mirrored his own sentiments, evoking the shocked stare he displayed now.

"On that note, don't you think everyone would have a much easier time accepting things if they felt that I was just a bumbling braggart of a mage? Especially for those confident in their own ability."

"...Why would you intentionally hurt your own ability to accept commissions? Even if commissions from the Twilight Pavilion are many, but the ones appropriate to you—"

"It's not like they necessarily exist. Definitely. Anyway, I have already provided for such a circumstance. There are countless jobs in need of a mage capable of working restorative magic. The ability to heal wounds is an ability where demand outstrips supply no matter where you are, particularly if the restorative magics you're capable of are especially rare."

As Suimei spoke, he advanced.

In Enmarph's eyes, it was as though the Devil himself were approaching.

"Hmph. I'm a mage, how could I possibly be done in so easily— Ugh?!"

As he shifted into a combat ready stance, he suddenly noticed. In his current state, he was helpless to offer any resistance whatsoever. The reason?

"And the trap snaps shut. Your magic's all gone, right? Kalavinka's Sweet Voice is just this kind of magic."

"Ah—"

...All magicians possessed the ability to resist magic. Using one's own mana, a mage was able to repel the effects of magic. As a magician, coming under the effect of another's magic was to be expected, and carefully studying methods for opposing their magic was a necessity.

However, one's defensive capabilities were naturally inextricably tied with the condition of one's body and mind.

What did this imply for Enmarph, drained dry as he was?

"It's just a forceful suggestion, really. Don't worry, there aren't any side effects. You'll just go to sleep, and when you awake, it'll all be as I just declared. I have no plans on hurting any of you."

...Suimei was a magician. As such, were he to battle the mages of this world, it would inevitably become a contest of magic. However, as someone who both wished to disguise himself as someone normal, all the while obtaining an accurate measure of his strength, he'd found himself in something of a conundrum.

However, were he to avoid magic battles, and restrict himself to fighting warriors only, then he'd lose the opportunity to learn about their world's magic.

For this purpose, once the battle was over, he needed a way to keep their mouths shut. Instead, draining the mana that provided a mage an opportunity to resist provided the perfect opportunity.

And so.

"So that's how it is... Wait, then earlier, you—"

Indeed.

"Exactly. That's why I needed to fight the two of you at the same time."

—With a chilling gaze of absolute zero, Suimei's hand covered Enmarph's head.



...Sunset. At this time, the crimson red of the sun melted into the dark blue of the dusky night.

His test finished, Suimei made his way back from the Twilight Pavilion to his room in the inn, before plopping down heavily on his bed.

Although there had been some unexpected twists prior to his test, everything from that point forward had proceeded just as planned, whether it be finding somewhere to stay, or the successful obtaining of his guild identification, and so he'd found his way back here.

Being able to resolve everything without problem was lucky indeed.

The only thing that had been beyond his expectations was finding out that he and Lefille were lodged in the same inn.

"A fortuitous meeting indeed..." Suimei muttered, as he remembered the circumstances of their meeting earlier.

Lefille Gurakis. A swordswoman with long, red hair. The figure she created when standing couldn't be described as anything but gorgeous. He wasn't sure how strong she was, but considering how unruffled she'd been after witnessing his battle, strong was definitely the word.

Moreover, although she was definitely capable of taking care of herself, there was something about her that made him worry. After the battle, when she'd been staring at him, he'd noticed.

Her originally clear, sharp gaze had momentarily clouded over. That was something unique to those who had been caught helplessly by ill fate, as if immersed in gloom.

Can't be, right...?

Suimei shook his head fiercely to clear his thoughts. There wasn't any point in losing himself in those kinds of thoughts here. No matter who, everyone had aspects to them that'd make you worry. That's all it was.

Truth be told, in the eyes of others, he probably looked like that himself. Anyway, worrying about her like this was fruitless. After their farewell earlier, it was quite possible that they'd never meet again in this life. It had been sheer happenstance that they'd even met this once, after all.

...Suimei gazed out his window. It was currently that period of time when evening was indistinguishable from night. Speaking of which, "nightfall" – just who had come up with that word? The fading light of the setting sun cast a long shadow over the surroundings, throwing them into obscurity, filling him with an indescribable feeling.

"Haaah..."

Suimei yawned under the effects of the lethargy which had suddenly crept up on him.

What was going on? It wasn't yet the time when he normally slept, and yet the Sandman had clearly begun to exert its influence over his body. He hadn't done anything particularly tiring, and yet found himself unable to fend off this wave of sleepiness.

Why?

Oh... That's why. Shit... This is...

—He'd thought of the reason. He knew this feeling. He knew why this overpowering sleepiness had crept upon him now that he was all alone.

Indeed. This was a phenomenon that would inevitably occur once he'd separated from "that type of person."

So that's why... of course...

This was a play of scenes from the future, something he was forced to watch due to Ludwig's curse. It announced the crises that awaited him, only for memories of what he'd seen to vanish once he awoke. These visions would last only for the immediate moment, a clairvoyance without the least value.

So this thing happens even here, huh? Even somewhere like this, this would still happen? Even in a world like this, straight out of the pages of a fantasy book, a world without the least connection to the world he called home.

He'd been fairly certain that it wouldn't happen here. If he were to successfully find a way home, this had been the one thing he hadn't looked forward to returning to.

Not wanting to let go of his thoughts, as he thought things through, his body unconsciously tightened, and collapsed atop his bed. There was no way to fight the sleepiness that came upon him.

At some point during this process, the image of his mother, who he'd never before seen, appeared on the chair in his room. This woman, who

he'd only ever heard about from his father, appeared now before his eyes under the effects of the curse.

♪ Ahhhh ♪

She was singing. Rather than a lullaby to lull a child to sleep, it was more a sorrowful aria lamenting the suffering her child was to experience. This very same song drew him into a world of dreams that were not dreams. Sleep~

—His mother, at the mercy of Ludwig's curse, held in one hand the book which recorded her future from which she recited, gently, dolefully.

—Enticing, ultramarine Al Kern. (TN: No idea what that term is supposed to be: アル・ケルン)

This was undoubtedly every bit the curse it was called. Having to chant the verses of a poem which told of a past and future from which she could not be saved. This illusion of his mother, who had succumbed to this curse, appeared each time.

It was for this reason that he raced to the side of all those who found themselves trapped helplessly by fate. His days of battle were about to begin once more it seemed.

Forcing open his leaden eyelids, Suimei looked upon the words of the book held by his departed mother.

—“Silence! I'm not going to run any more. I will live on as I should!”

The survivor of a broken country. The young, half-spirit swordswoman, forced to bear the shameful curse laid upon her by the Varied Races: Lefille Gurakis Nosya.

"Shut it! For someone like me, only needed for my ability in battle, this is fine!"

Hatred her eternal companion, the Empire's human weapon who had immersed herself in the abyss of dark magics: Liliana Zandark.

"—We meet again, Suimei. I'd thought for sure that we'd never see each other again. That's why, let's never part again."

At the mercy of fate and Nureha of Kadath, his friend who had come to be known as the Sword Princess: Kuchiba Hatsumi.

"—Enough with the pretty words! No matter how many times you say such things, happiness will never come!"

The dark green figure, cursed by Ludwig, whom he'd sworn an oath to save: Isrina Coulanges.

"Suimei. Humans and the Mazoku are the same. If both sides are as filthy as this, then I—"

He who had been summoned alongside Suimei, the hero who had turned his back on humanity out of despair. Holy sword in hand, the

swordsman of the hidden god: Shana Reiji.

"—It's been a long time, brat. How's it been? You any stronger now?"

The world's strongest swordsman, called to this other world by a forbidden, unplanned summoning: Beowulf Schneider.

"—So this is my enemy?"

The ferocious demon lord who controlled all curses, the empress of the Varied Races: Nakshatra.

...Sleep, Suimei. If you don't rest when you can, then there will come a day when you will fall. Because that is the fate that inescapably awaits you.

With those words that he should not have been able to hear, Suimei's consciousness faded into darkness.

Chapter 17: Unpleasant Memory

—The girl had once had a dream.

A very normal, very ordinary dream: to protect the place where she'd been born as well as the people who had raised her.

For people born to this world, particularly those who were living proper lives, this was more or less a desire they all held in common.

This girl lived as those nameless masses did, with that dream guiding her.

There was, however, a distinct difference between that girl and the others who shared her dream. She was, in fact, anything but a normal human. Instead, she was born the scion of an ancient line of spirits, apostles of the Goddess Arshuna. It was her duty to repel the invasions of the Varied Races, and so she had come to be known as the Miko. (TN: The characters here are “神子”, an alternative to the more commonly used “巫女”. These characters literally translate to “God's child”.)

As the girl tirelessly developed her swordsmanship, she'd often hear, “Spirits are the Goddess Arshuna's gift to humanity, a rare power that exists to defend against the Varied Races.”

And so defeat was not an option.

To protect the peaceful lives of the people, this was a power that could not be allowed to disappear.

And so the girl continued to live, praying constantly to the Goddess Arshuna even as she ceaselessly practiced her swordsmanship. On occasion, she'd make her way north to repel the invasions of the Varied Races, laying their raiding parties to waste. And so the days passed, the girl continually able to realize her dream.

Even though it left her without even the possibility of realizing the happiness of being born a woman, the girl never gave up on her dream.

But dreams come to an end.

When the new Maou ascended to the throne, her dream vanished like the popping of a bubble.

By the time the news reached the capital, it was already far too late. A swarming flood of a million strong of the Varied Races swept through the north. Cities and villages disappeared in their wake, swallowed by this ferocious threat.

Overwhelming numbers. Moreover, each individual member of the Varied Races displayed a power far exceeding human ability. Their indomitable might coupled with their staggering numbers left humanity in complete and utter despair.

That notwithstanding, the girl fought to keep hope alive, infinitesimal though it might be. To protect her homeland and its people, she would

continue to swing that sharp blade for as long as there was yet breath in her body.

Before her power as a Spirit and her divine swordsmanship, countless members of the Varied Races were transformed into a mountain of corpses.

The girl was strong. Stronger even than any of the North's most elite troops. That strength, however, availed them not as they were swept away by the violent, overpowering might of the enemy.

Beneath the force of crushing malice, the girl's dream shattered. The girl's homeland was trampled by the invading force, and the lives of those whom she had fought to protect were cut tragically short.

That overwhelming power was absolute even when it came to the girl.

The girl suffered defeat at the hands of a leader of the Varied Races' army, his strength as terrible as though evil itself had been made manifest. Worse still, after her loss, she had been made the victim of a shameful and vile curse.

Perhaps this is my end, the girl thought, resigning herself to the fate her companions had met: for this, her homeland, to be her final resting place. She had fought that wretched enemy general to her very last and dealt him injuries from which he would never recover.

Sadly, even this solemn, stirring resolution of hers was to be broken – her people told her to live.

Indeed, the power the girl wielded was invaluable. It was a gift from the heavens, the Goddess of Justice made manifest, the power of the spirits bestowed by the Goddess Arshuna herself. A rare and precious power that was antithetical to the Varied Races, who worshiped at the altar of a wicked god.

She was a hope that must not disappear, a light that must not be extinguished. And so she could not be allowed to die there. No, she would have to live on in shame, growing steadily in strength until the day she could plunge the sword of retribution straight into the heart of the Mazoku.

...Once, the girl had a dream. Now, she didn't even have a choice.

And so it was that, once more, on this day, the girl – Lefille Gurakis Noshias – wept silent tears alone.



Several days after his visit to the guild, Suimei, having woken up bright and early, was swinging his sword in practice.

"Sei! Ha!"

Repeatedly, he swung his sword in a vertical motion, from high to low, his breathing steady and undisturbed.

This was a practiced motion for him, and one from his youth, though not something that he had learned from his father. No, this was something he had learned at the dojo near where he lived.

Although his father, a magician, was also an expert at close combat, he had decided this matter was still best left to the professionals, and had taken his son to the nearby dojo.

These chained motions were a part of the swordsmanship he had learned there.

Swordsmanship was something that would inevitably deteriorate without consistent and steady effort. With the exception of a few exceptionally talented individuals, a week's time was sufficient to degrade one's swordsmanship.

This was doubly the case for Suimei, who had devoted his time in the palace to study.

While it's true that Suimei could well rely on his magic or magic items to engage in close combat – swordsmanship wasn't a necessity per se – he nevertheless felt far more at ease with a sword in hand.

"Fuuu... That should do it..."

Taking a deep breath as he finished a set, he wiped his sweat with a towel. Although today's practice was a bit simpler compared to his normal routine, but in light of his plans for the rest of the day, it would do.

This was not a day when he could afford to be exhausted right from the get-go. Today was the day when Suimei would set out on an escort mission destined for the Nelferian Empire.

This escort mission would take him from city to city, nation to nation. His undertaking this commission was, of course, because it aligned with his goals.

His objective was to discover a way home and then to create the path that would do so.

To that end, visiting the Empire – a place that far outstripped Aster in both ease of obtaining intel and resources – was a necessity. The first stop along that path required that he first reach the city of Kurand, on Aster's western border, near the Empire.

Kurand was a city that sat on the boundary between Aster and Nelferia. It was a highly developed city with regards to both trade and intel, second only after the capital, Mehter itself. Suimei wanted to get a grasp on the workings of the Empire before actually setting foot in the country, and so he'd planned to spend some time in Kurand gathering resources before making way to his final destination.

For this purpose, Suimei had attached himself to a business caravan which was thoroughly acquainted with the area and the journey.

...He'd been on the constant lookout for such commissions at the guild, when finally this opportunity had presented itself the day before.

Because competition was fierce, he'd originally assumed that it would have taken quite some time to successfully accept such a commission. Instead, however, it had only been three or four days, quite a bit earlier than his projections.

When it came to this, it had to be said that his ability to use restorative magic played a large role. By the time D-ranked magician Suimei had made his way to the reception window, the caravan had already met its requirements for bodyguards. That notwithstanding however, the leader of the caravan had said that when it came to mages wielding healing magics, the more the merrier, and welcomed Suimei.

As presumed, this world was quite welcoming towards mages capable of using restorative magic.

Given that his guild record was still a blank slate with regards to accomplishments, it was possible that the caravan leader was of the opinion that if he was really of use, then it was all worthwhile.

In any event, his plans for the day were already set. Today, he would leave Mehter.

Right then. Let's head back, Suimei thought to himself, hiding his mercury blade once more on his person.

On the way back to the inn to make final checks on his preparation for the journey ahead, Suimei was walking back to his room when he crashed into someone headfirst going around a corner.

“Oh man, I’m so sorr—!”

For a brief moment, he saw stars. Shaking slightly from the impact, Suimei apologized for his inattentiveness.

Suddenly, he stopped short. More accurately, he was left speechless by a sudden turn of events.

The person Suimei had crashed into was a fellow member of the guild as well as someone lodged in the same inn as him – Lefille Gurakis.

However, what had stunned him so was not that the person he had literally run into was someone familiar to him.

No, he had interrupted himself because this girl, Lefille Gurakis, looked terribly off.

Indeed, she’d come rushing in from somewhere – outside?! – dressed only in her underwear, her eyes red and swollen, tears running down her face.

“Ah—”

Lefille seemed to have finally realized how she must look. Even so, she simply gasped, frozen in surprise. The sorrow that weighed upon her soul was such that it seemingly left her unable to care about her appearance, coming far second to the dark cloud of gloom that rested upon her.

"Uh, um, eh—?"

The other party, Suimei, was similarly frozen stiff, unsure of how to react to the unexpected situation.

Although he'd definitely run into her with a fair amount of force, from what he could tell, this hadn't been caused by the impact. Both her state of dress and her weeping were simply too far out of the blue.

"Oh, sorry..."

At long last, Lefille seemed to have come to. She wiped her tears, offered those words in a pained voice, and completely disregarding Suimei's words, dashed directly further into the inn.

Suimei, completely dumbfounded, stood frozen in place before finally muttering to himself in confusion.

"What on earth was that...?"

It was, however, early in the morning, and with all others lost in dreamland, there were none to answer him.

Chapter 18: Caravan Guard

Several hours after the morning incident. Suimei passed through the city wall encircling Mehter, dressed in the clothing he'd purchased earlier, the altered bag he'd brought with him from his world in one hand.

Despite having taken the time to finish final preparations at the inn, finish breakfast, and even kill some time before departure, Suimei had not had a chance to either apologize or say farewell to Lefille. Fate permitting, we'll meet again anyway, he thought to himself, before taking off at the appointed time.

Running through a few requisite exit procedures with the sentry at the city gate, he finally exited the city.

At the side of the long road leading away from the city was the meeting place for the caravan escorts.

Before reaching the rendezvous point, however, Suimei suddenly turned to look behind him, some unknown feeling prompting to him to take in the soaring city walls.

This was Suimei's first time looking at these city walls, which protected Mehter every day, from this close.

It was a massive defensive structure encircling the entire city.

Although it had been constructed not only for the purpose of protecting the palace, but the entire capital as a whole, the term “castle wall” felt nonetheless appropriate. Back in his own world, the construction of castle-like rampart walls to protect cities had similarly been a common practice back in the Middle Ages.

An integral part of the defensive function of the structure, the top of the wall was arrayed with battlements featuring both parapets for defending against enemy archers as well as crenels for defending archers to fire their own arrows through.

It looked like the people of this world relied on such fortifications to defend against external threats to the city – both human and monster alike.

However—

Just like Dorothea mentioned earlier, it doesn’t look like these walls are protected against magic.

Looking at the city wall, Dorothea’s words came to mind. Indeed, the wall running around Mehter seemed to be constructed of a very different type of material from the magic-resistant one that the guild training field had been built with.

Instead, it looked to have been built using a kind of gray brick, likely the same type of primitive concrete that the Ancient Greeks had used to build the many temples of their gods. This was likely because the magic-resistant material had been a recent discovery, and thus could not have been used in the construction of these walls, given their age. On that

point, given the scarcity of the material in question, it likely couldn't have been used on such a large structure anyway.

"But like this, a single powerful spell is all it would take to bring this whole thing down."

Objects subjected to direct magical attack would very quickly crumble, let alone a primitive structure like this one.

Although it looked impressive enough, but considering the vital role it played in defense, he had to say it didn't seem that reliable. Increasing its size would do nothing; its fundamental flaw was its fragility.

Worrying about this is meaningless, Suimei thought as he turned back. The defensive capability of the city was no concern of his – he had defensive walls of his own, after all. Spending any more time pondering the defenses of this world was a pointless endeavor.

Pulling his thoughts back to the present, Suimei looked at the empty space before him, where people had already begun to gather.

Standing there were a number of people dressed in rather fine clothing as well as roughly twenty who were armed. In total, there were some dozens of people as well as a handful of wagons.

It had already reached the scale where it could be considered a small, mobile village – this was the caravan that Suimei was looking for.

Caravans. In his original world, similar things had existed. Merchants

and transporters would join together to protect both themselves and their cargo when passing through dangerous areas, defending against robbers and other violence.

The caravan head was typically a merchant responsible for transporting goods between cities, who engaged in this business as a livelihood. Other members of the caravan included both those who traveled under this banner as well as unaffiliated merchants who joined for the journey.

I have to say, this is pretty much what I expected.

The scene before him essentially mirrored his knowledge of how such things worked back home. At least with respect to outer appearance, there wasn't really anything that stood out as being different.

However, if one were to instead consider the armed individuals standing by the wayside, the differences between this caravan and ones back home would become immediately apparent.

A single glance would reveal armored warriors and mages alike, including even female swordswomen similar to Lefille among their number.

Although the armed individuals numbered not more than twenty, Suimei nevertheless felt that this was quite a substantial force already.

The sheer number of guards that had been hired was a testament to the dangers of this world.

Not only was the level of civilization in this world considerably low, but many dangers were also present that were not to be found in his own world. In this world, without suitable martial force, travel between cities and kingdoms would already be all but impassable; transportation methods from back home such as airplanes and rail were, of course, an impossibility.

Traveling between cities consisted of following the large, paved road. Street lights did not exist, and even finding a water source or lodgings required a good amount of effort.

As Suimei considered the circumstances, he came to realize just how convenient life had really been back in his own world.

Debating the relative conveniences and inconveniences of the two worlds with himself, Suimei finally arrived, and made his way toward a particular man who was dressed like a merchant.

From the description he'd been given at the guild when accepting the request, this appeared to be the man who had given the commission to the Twilight Pavilion.

"Can I help you?"

"I'm Yakagi Suimei, from the adventurer's guild. I'm here to present myself as one of the escorts for this caravan."

The man first met Suimei's business-like introduction with a look of suspicion, his expression changing as he suddenly remembered

something.

"Oh, how polite. I'm Galeo, the one who's organized this caravan. You're the Yakagi who knows restorative magic, I presume? Thank you for accepting this request. If any are injured along the way to Kurand, I'll be relying on you."

"No problem at all. It's a pleasure to be working with you as well."

Suimei took the outstretched hand in a handshake, signaling the end of their business meeting.

Suddenly, however, Galeo looked at Suimei with some confusion on his face.

"I'd heard Yakagi-san was a mage, but your clothing..."

"Oh, my clothes?"

"Mm-hmm. No matter how I look at it, I can't see it as a mage's clothing..."

So he's confused about this too, huh?

"Haha. I'm not actually that fond of mage's clothing, to be quite honest with you," Suimei answered with an unfeigned smile.

Galeo again gave him an appraising look.

"Oh? Why's that?"

"Let's see, how do I put this... Mage clothing is so over-the-top, as if to rub how great we are in people's faces. It's totally putting on airs."

This was indeed how Suimei truly felt after seeing the apparel of the mages of this world. These last few days, up until he'd managed to accept this commission, he'd often gone out for strolls on the town. He had thus seen more than a few magicians and staff members of the magician's guild.

His impression at the time? How incredibly pompous.

Now, that wasn't to say that all mages were thus attired, or even that clothing of this nature was inherently inappropriate. Nevertheless, for Suimei, new to this as he was, the mere thought of dressing in that manner filled him with embarrassment.

Additionally, Suimei had no particular desire to appear particularly mysterious, important, or superior.

Furthermore, the sight of their clothing brought to mind images of his own world, where he'd seen the ostentatious mage clothing of antiquity. Even if it meant creating unnecessary misunderstandings, he refused to look like that.

Finally, although his situation was indeed slightly special, the other

magicians Suimei had met – his father and the Society head included – were similarly dressed in normal clothing.

“Oh, I see. ...Well, if I have to be honest with you, I don’t really like that style of clothing either. Any time I have to interact with those types, they always give off the feeling that they’re superior to me.”

“Is that so? Yeah, I have to say I don’t feel like that suits me.”

“Yep, yep. I can totally understand that. I definitely prefer your type, who are more mild and polite in your dealings.”

“Oh, that reminds me. I’ve already prepared things like a magic staff, so you don’t need to worry about that.”

100% lie.

“Oh, okay. There’s nothing else on my mind then. We’ll be in your care for the duration of the trip.”

“Right.”

Suimei’s agreement marked the end of the conversation and Galeon returned to join the other merchants.

He definitely had other matters to take care of. They were about to set out, after all. It was natural that he’d be busy at this time as the one in charge of the caravan.

At that moment, a nostalgic voice called out to Suimei, instilling him with a sense of déjà vu.

"...Excuse me, but is that you, Suimei-kun?"

"Huh? Oh, Gurakis-san?"

Suimei turned to see the figure of someone who shouldn't have been there: Lefille Gurakis.

"What brings you here? I'm sure you said that you weren't planning on leaving for a short while yet?" he asked, thoroughly nonplussed.

Because Suimei and Lefille had stayed at the same inn, they'd conversed several times. Through those conversations, he'd learned that Lefille had some things to take care of, and thus hadn't planned on leaving for some time yet.

So why would she be here, looking like she's ready to set out as well? Suimei was unable to come up with an explanation.

His question prompted a nod from Lefille.

"Yeah, you're right. It's just that the reward from the commission I accepted a couple days ago was quite a bit larger than expected. That meant that I met my goal for earnings earlier than expected as well."

"So you've saved up enough?"

"Yep. I'm definitely fine on that point," Lefille answered with a calm smile.

When they'd spoken earlier, she'd told him that she needed to stay around Mehter for a while, to save up money for travel as well as expenses for study.

"...If you don't mind my asking, can I ask what kind of request that was?"

"Monster bounty. A large monster appeared a fair distance from here. The situation was pretty urgent, and so the reward was quite large."

" 'A large monster'? " Suimei inquired, his interest piqued.

He'd never guessed that something like that had happened while he'd been waiting for an escort mission.

"Yep. A semi-giant."

"Semi-giant..."

"Mm-hmm."

...She didn't continue.

She apparently was under the misconception that Suimei would understand with just that.

"...Um, and what exactly is that?"

"...Eh? You don't know, Suimei-kun? We're talking about semi-giants, you know?"

"I'm afraid not. There's nothing like that where I'm from, you see."

"O-oh, wow. Um, okay... So there are places like that too..."

His answer had been too unexpected; Lefille was completely taken aback. This was to be expected, however. As a visitor from another world, there was a veritable mountain of "common knowledge" items of which Suimei was ignorant. The name included the word "giant", so he could at least tell that this monster was large and humanoid.

"Okay. Semi-giants are a subspecies of giant. They're one-eyed, and though smaller in stature than a normal giant, are still quite massive. Their arm strength is of particular note, and is at a frightening level – they can shatter a city wall with a single arm. But still, I have to say... That a monster like this, which commonly appears in fairytales, doesn't exist in the east..."

"Well, you could say that. ...So Gurakis-san, how did you defeat it?"

Suimei's sigh carried a tinge of astonishment. A being that was capable of destroying a city wall was clearly extremely dangerous. Lefille's casual

attitude when speaking of having defeated the monster, without the least hint of pride or excitement... It looked like she was a rather incredible person.

"It wasn't like I did it on my own, you know? A number of us formed a party to take it down. My contributions were quite small, in fact."

Given the indifferent look on her face, he was unable to tell if she was simply being modest or not. Nevertheless, he had a hard time believing her words...

Anyway—

"On that note, can I ask if this monster is pretty common?"

Semi-giants. As he posed this question, he envisioned a slightly smaller version of the legendary Cyclops from the stories of his world. This time its appearance had been sudden, but how were things normally?

Suimei's head drooped gloomily as he awaited Lefille's reply. Pleaaaaase tell me something like that isn't a common occurrence.

"Not at all. Small monsters are one thing, but large monsters like the semi-giant are quite rare. Actually, speaking of that, this area isn't a suitable environment for them."

I guess they're not that common after all, Suimei thought to himself just as Lefille continued.

"That said, I can't say it was entirely coincidence. The fact of the matter is that it did appear here, after all."

"Yeah..."

...Lefille's words prompted Suimei to sink into thought. From what he'd read in the palace library with respect to monster ecology, there were two or three main hypotheses as to why large monsters appeared.

First, a naturally occurring phenomenon resulting in spontaneous generation. Second, mutation. Finally, offspring of the Mazoku which suffered from cognitive defects at birth.

Suimei personally felt that the last hypothesis seemed the most likely. The first two options were simply too coincidental, whereas the last conjecture seemed reasonable enough. If it was indeed true, however, then that would mean—

"There's Mazoku nearby."

Although he didn't know where Lefille had fought the semi-giant, this was nevertheless obvious conclusion to draw.

Lefille, however, did not reply. Perhaps she had figured he was simply mumbling to himself.

"Gurakis-san?"

"...Oh, yeah, maybe."

She had been so slow to reply that Suimei turned to look, only to find her gazing off into the distance.

The valiant, elegant spirit that had formerly been reflected in her pupils had been replaced by a murky shadow.

He didn't know why, but something about their conversation just now had put her in a dreary mood.

...After a brief moment, Lefille finally seemed to notice Suimei's worried look, dispelling the dark mood in an instant.

"It's nothing. Please don't worry about it."

"Hah..."

She was definitely thinking about something, Suimei thought to himself as he expressed perplexed acknowledgment. Lefille, on the other hand, cut off that thread of conversation, pretending as though nothing had happened.

"Um, about that..."

"...?"

That solemn, valiant feeling vanished alongside her hesitant words. She seemed to be embarrassed about something, her tone finally matching her age.

"Er no, it's just that... Um, well..."

"...?"

Lefille hesitated. Closer consideration revealed that her cheeks had taken on a reddish tinge. What the heck is going on?

Turning her head slightly, Lefille peeked at Suimei out of the corner of her eye. Finally, having resolved herself, she spoke.

"U-um, sorry about this morning. I showed you a bad side of me..." she said with her head hung, embarrassed.

Shockingly, she brought up the incident from that morning herself.

Even though Lefille had just apologized, Suimei felt that he'd been rather careless himself, and so—

"Oh, no, not at all... I was too careless. Sorry about that, really. I should have been paying more attention as I took that corner."

"No, the fault was mine. I should have been more aware of my surroundings. Please don't worry yourself over it. It was truly my mistake."

Lefille rebuffed his words with a shake of her head and another apology.

Suimei gathered his courage, and asked her a question.

"...Um, might I ask what happened?"

"Er... sorry!"

"...Not at all. Those should be my words. Sorry for asking you something like that. Please just forget I asked."

Recognizing that Lefille was unable to answer, Suimei immediately apologized, discarding any plans to inquire further.

What had happened that morning was likely both complicated and inconvenient to share. Although he was definitely still concerned, but he knew better than to pry.

"I-I'm going to go present myself to the caravan leader," Lefille hurriedly pronounced, seemingly unable to endure the current atmosphere before walking off in Galeo's direction without waiting for a reply from Suimei.

TL Notes:

In the last two chapters, I translated a certain term as “Other Race”. I’d like to explain a little more about that as well as make a correction. The series uses two distinct terms when talking about the demons: “魔族” (Mazoku), which directly translates to “demon race”, and “異なる種族” (kotonaru shuzoku) which essentially means “different/varied race(s)” (plurals can be hard to distinguish from singulars in Chinese/Japanese). Originally, I’d opted for “other” in the sense of “different”, but was made aware by wuhugm from the animesuki forums that this was meant to describe the fact that there are multiple races serving under the Mazoku. As such, I’ve updated my past translations to say “Varied Races” instead, which is what I’ll be using from now on.

Chapter 19: Heart To Heart

Some tens of minutes after Suimei and Lefille were reunited, the caravan set off without delay.

Their journey was off to a good start. If the rest of the trip could continue without any unwanted surprises, that would be fantastic.

What was left to them now was to make their way to Kurand while keeping an eye on the caravan. When it came to how far they had to travel, Suimei had already investigated the matter thoroughly beforehand.

Traveling between Mehter and Kurand was roughly a six or seven day trip. Due to the proximity of the capital city Mehter to the western border, the time it took to travel between these cities could still be seen as relatively short. Nevertheless, for a child of the modern era such as Suimei, walking for an entire day was fairly rough going.

During this time, they'd follow the stone road through forest and plateau, mountain and basin before eventually reaching their destination.

For the trip, Suimei had been positioned at the rear end of the caravan.

Those more worthy of trust – veterans of the guild and career mercenaries – led the way while Suimei and the others were responsible for keeping watch over the cargo.

Because human lives were seen as the priority, they'd been informed that were something to occur, they were to prioritize the safety of the wagon drivers over the cargo itself. On a different note, Suimei was currently walking alongside Lefille, who had similarly undertaken the responsibility of protecting the caravan goods.

Perhaps owing to the earlier awkwardness, as the trip first began, Lefille mostly kept to herself, keeping an eye on the wagons, horses, and their surroundings, only occasionally breaking the silence.

Slowly but surely, however, because their ages were so close as well as the fact that they were colleagues engaged in the same task, conversation between them gradually grew warmer.

Accompanied by the gentle sounds of the horses' hooves against the road, the turning of the wagon wheels, and the gentle breeze blowing across the plains, Suimei and Lefille chatted with one another.

"—And the Goddess Arshuna?"

"Ah, she is the creator of heaven and earth, the one who maintains the existence of this world. This is what the Church of Salvation teaches. She is the Most High, standing above all others."

"I see..."

Suimei pondered as he listened to Lefille's words.

As they walked, Lefille explained the doctrine of the Goddess Arshuna. At their first meeting in the guild, they'd already had a short discussion about the church, and Suimei had thus realized that he had a serious gap in knowledge when it came to the beliefs of the people in this world. At some point unknown to him, Lefille had become aware of this situation.

Suimei had thus decided that this was a perfect opportunity to have her teach him some basic knowledge.

On that note, it looks like pretty much everyone in this world is a monotheistic believer of the Most High Goddess, Arshuna.

In other words, it didn't seem like there were any deities other than Arshuna.

Transforming the primal chaos of origin into the current world was the work of a god.

Borrowing the power of the elements, and infusing magic with said power was equivalent to borrowing the power of the Goddess. Although the Mazoku worshiped a similar existence in the Evil God, the Church of Salvation utterly rejected the notion that it was a god.

"Furthermore, even though our races may be different, all acknowledge the existence of the Goddess Arshuna, whether it be the spirits, the dwarves, the beastmen, or the dragonewts (dragonmen)."

"Hmm—"

Lefille had unconsciously raised a point of interest for Suimei, who reacted.

"Is something wrong?"

"No, it's just that from what you've said, demihuman tribes exist as well."

"Well, of course. ...Wait, do they not appear where you're from?"

"Only in conversation."

Although it might have been a vague way of expressing things, it wasn't false. When it came to fantasy stories, their existence was nothing if not expected. These tribes seemed to be a normal part of life in this world, and so Suimei's answer was likely fine.

That said, I certainly didn't see any in Mehter—

"Well then, you'll get your first chance to see them once we reach Nelferia. That place is a melting pot of races. Spirits and dragonewts are a bit rare, but there are a lot of beastmen. —Oh, that reminds me, we seem to have gotten a bit off-topic. Did you have any other questions about the Goddess?"

"Nope. This is plenty for today. Thanks; I've learned a lot."

Respectfully, Suimei expressed his gratitude to Lefille who had earnestly

taught him without the least manifestation of impatience.

Lefille smiled brightly, denying that her efforts had been worthy of thanks.

"It's nothing. On that note, does that mean the Goddess Arshuna doesn't exist in the east?"

"Hahaha, well, you could say that..." Suimei answered vaguely.

"Existence" was a word for things that were concrete. Putting aside an observable, accessible concept like elements, as far as the people of this world were concerned, the Goddess Arshuna was not some sort of ambiguous concept, but rather a certainty.

Given this, it was perhaps most appropriate to view this existence as a natural, if unique, phenomenon.

From a magician's perspective, "gods" were largely just a conceptual existence, an external force that interfered with the world. In practice, this view seemed to be more or less on point.

That brought an end to that topic.

Suimei turned his gaze to Lefille, walking beside him. Unlike the first time they'd met, this time she was carrying her luggage.

The girl carried on her back a pack just large enough to fit the armor

she'd worn earlier, as well as an enormous piece of luggage.

"...Is something the matter, Suimei-kun?"

"Oh, I was just thinking that that bag you're carrying is pretty huge."

"Oh, this?" she replied, looking back.

On the back of this girl, of a height roughly on par with Suimei, was an extremely long piece of luggage – longer than she was tall – wrapped in cloth.

Moreover, judging by the shape, was it perhaps—

"It's been pretty eye-catching right from the start, to be honest. It's a sword, right?"

"Yep."

Lefille nodded acknowledgment of Suimei's guess. It looked like that gigantic thing was indeed a sword.

Its size was stunning even at first glance, and closer consideration only reinforced that feeling. It looked like it was the kind of weapon that was meant to chop giant bears in two.

Without a doubt, however, by far the most astounding thing was

Lefille's strength, able to carry such a burden on her back as she walked, all the while never showing the least sign of strain or sweat.

Even though he'd previously seen her carry a slender sword, the cognitive dissonance created by the sight of this enormous weapon and a young girl's physique was simply too exaggerated. Along those lines, how could those slender arms possibly support the inevitably massive weight of such a thing? That said, if she was bringing it, she was definitely capable of using it. Perhaps she had a reinforcement magic similar to the "Burn Boost" Reiji had used back in the palace.

"Why would you choose something like that for your weapon of choice?"

Even setting aside the issue of whether or not she was capable of wielding this massive sword, it didn't seem like a weapon appropriate for a young woman.

In response to his words, Lefille gave the weapon on her back a loving glance.

"This is a family heirloom. Its previous owner was my father, from whom I inherited it."

"Does that mean you used a different type of weapon at first?"

"No."

If it was an inheritance from her father, then there had to have been

some period of time before it'd come into her possession. Lefille refuted this idea, however, swinging her arms as though the sword were in her hands.

"I've immersed myself in swordsmanship ever since I was but a child, always dreaming of the day that I'd be able to swing a sword like this."

"I guess that means you're pretty confident about using it," Suimei asked, slightly ill-naturedly.

Lefille's response was candid.

"Hehe. Unfortunately, it's for that very reason that I'm not proficient in anything but the sword."

"Not at all. I think you're pretty amazing. I know a thing or two about swordsmanship, but when it comes to using a sword like that, I haven't the least confidence."

Lefille's self-mocking words were met with a tone of respect.

Swords weren't something you wielded simply with strength. When it came to slashing, then certainly arm strength was a key factor, but actual battle skills were another thing altogether. Effectively wielding a sword in battle didn't just require a certain amount of strength, but also the bodily control to flourish it as desired.

Anyway, when Suimei spoke of his inability to use such a weapon, the primary reason was that its weight and size were beyond his body's

ability to support.

It was likely because of Lefille's mastery of a sword like this that she had chosen it as her primary weapon.

That was also likely the reason that she uttered the words that came next.

"—It's nothing special. With a little practice, anyone'd be able to chop a semi-giant in two with this."

"..."

I misheard her just now. MISHEARD. Lefille had just said something insane with a casual tone. Seriously, there's not a chance in hell you could learn how to chop a semi-giant – a being capable of destroying a city wall with its fists – in two with just "a little practice"! Her earlier words, that she had taken down the semi-giant only with the aid of her companions, were now clearly naught but hollow modesty.

That meant that this young girl hadn't even come close to going all out in her ranking battle. Comparing her ability with the master swordsmen of his world put her on an entirely different plane of existence.

As Suimei shook his head, Lefille took the opportunity to ask a question of her own.

"Suimei-kun, can I ask what you're best at?"

"I didn't hear anything. I HEARD NOTHING! —Eh?"

"Suimei-kun? Are you alright?"

"Eh? Oh, ohhhh. I, well... pretty much this."

Finally realizing that the topic of conversation had shifted, Suimei showed his answer, rather than spoke it.

To make it easy for her to understand, he concentrated mana in the palm of his hand.

That made the answer apparent. Lefille, who had asked without really thinking, showed an expression of understanding.

"Magic, right? Well, I guess since you're a mage, that should have been pretty obvious."

"Although it has to be said that when I first started, there was a period when I was pretty much clueless."

"Clueless?"

Lefille's question caused him to think for a bit before responding, a somewhat perplexed smile on his face.

"Yes. Lefille, when you first started to learn how to use a sword, what did they tell you?"

"—Hmm, well, it'd always be these long, drawn-out lectures that always started from the origin of it all, leading up to the reason why it was necessary that I wield a sword, *etc.* My ears practically bled I heard it so many times," she answered, half-jokingly.

That even the origin of swords was a point of instruction showed just what history lay behind it all.

As Suimei envisioned that scene in his mind, he remembered what it was like when he had first started to learn magic.

That was a thing already many years in the past. When he was young, his father had brought him to the one room in their house where entry was forbidden, and there—

"...My father wasn't the type to talk much. I never had an experience like yours. It's just that, from the very start, he told me that this was something I had to master."

"He didn't even give you a reason?"

"Well, that much he did. It wasn't a reason that a young child could understand, though. Moreover, I never had any intention of asking, and so he never spoke about it. Unfortunately, for that very reason, it wasn't until very late that I heard the answer from my father."

His tone was nostalgic as he spoke, as the scene from his memory replayed itself before his eyes.

Indeed, by the time he'd heard the reason, he'd already long since begun to tread the path of a magician. It was entirely possible that had "that incident" not occurred, his father would have taken that answer with him to the grave.

Thinking along those lines, it occurred to him that perhaps the reason his father had taught him magic was that he had seen it as the one thing he could do for his son as a father.

"Is that really alright?" Lefille asked next.

"Yeah. I enjoy learning magic. It's not something I at all resent. Although I have to say it's brought on its fair share of hardship as well."

"Is that so?" Lefille said with a laugh, thinking to herself that what had just been said was of interest.

"...Mm? Did I say something strange?"

"Not at all. I was just surprised to find that there's someone like me."

Indeed, that was it.

"That we're both burdened people is something I can definitely agree on."

"Definitely."

Lefille nodded. It looked like his words had been spot on. She must have also encountered more than a few obstacles as she advanced down the path of swordsmanship.

As he mused, a thought seemed to have come to Lefille's mind.

"—That reminds me, Suimei-kun. In the end, what rank did they give you?"

"Ahh—I was given a D-rank."

His answer left her stunned.

"...Why? I, who defeated them in succession, was given a B-rank. How is it possible that you, who defeated them simultaneously, are a D-rank?"

"Yeah, about that..."

What had his words made her think? Suddenly, as if she'd come to a conclusion, her gaze sharpened. The laughing tone she'd used until this point suddenly turned frigid.

"So that's how it is. So even an organization as renowned as the guild would pull something like this. Hmph. I would never have imagined that they'd straight up manipulate guild ranks just to save some face..."

“Wha...?”

Her sudden and complete misunderstanding left Suimei flustered. He would never have guessed she'd arrive at such a conclusion.

“Well, isn't that what happened? That seems like the only logical conclusion?”

“No, no. While I can't deny that reasoning, but still...”

“No, I can't accept such a thing. Once we get to Kurand, let's head to the branch office and raise a complaint. Don't worry, I'll go with you. If they try to pull something again, I'll act as the witness and have them perform the exam once more.”

With that, Lefille mumbled, “Right, let's do that,” and other such things to herself.

This totally isn't her problem, why does she care so much? It looked like Lefille was the kind of person who wouldn't let acts of injustice stand.

In the end, what it came down to was the fact that she was serious about helping Suimei “bring the truth to light”, something that he could not allow her to do.

Instead—

"...To be honest with you, my D-rank is something I personally requested of those three. That's why rank's so low."

What he had said was so nonsensical that Lefille, frowning, looked at him in confusion.

"You asked for it? Why would you do something like that?"

"When Dorothea said that I'd gain a reputation, it really gave me pause."

Although his explanation was pretty flimsy indeed, he was unable to come up with anything better.

However, as with his conversation with Galeo earlier, it had to be said that his words weren't exactly a lie either. Certainly, a high rank wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Can't say as I see Lefille being convinced by that, though... he sighed inwardly. Unexpectedly, however, Lefille seemed to take his words at face value.

"Is that really okay with you? A high rank should prove extremely valuable even in Kurand and Nelferia, you know? There really isn't anything to be gained by holding on to such a low rank."

That was certainly true, providing that he planned to live off of the work provided by the Twilight Pavilion. That was not, however, the case.

"I'm not really that hung up on working for the guild, although I can't say I want to be poor either. It's fine."

"...Just what exactly do you plan to do by going to Kurand and the Empire?"

"Well, gather some information, I guess."

"Information?"

"Coming from the east, there's still a lot I don't know about things here. I need to learn."

"..."

His harmless reasoning was met by a silent stare.

She watched him closely, her tight gaze seemingly reading right through him, interpreting the true meaning behind his words and expression.

When it came to Lefille, Suimei was determined to play the fool to the end.

"Did I say something strange?"

"No, I was just trying to decide if you were lying just now. —Actually, 'lying' is the wrong word. You weren't lying, but you weren't telling the whole truth either."

How? Suimei didn't think there were any logical gaps in what he'd said just now.

"...And why would you think that?" he asked with some surprise, a wry smile on his face.

"Women's intuition."

"Again with the unreliable stuff."

"Hehe, I was just joking, actually. That said, I've met a lot of people, so I can see through a thing or two," she offered in explanation, simultaneously praising herself. "—You haven't lied to me, but you're certainly hiding a ton of secrets. I'm 100% sure that's the case."

"...Perhaps."

In response to Lefille's discerning comment, Suimei gave a vague reply and shrugged his shoulders. There wasn't any real need to vehemently reject her words. This should be fine.

"...Alright then. It doesn't seem like this is something I should stick my nose into. I won't say anything more about your rank," she said finally.

"Don't worry about it. And thank you."

Although on the surface of things, Suimei was apologetic, but he wasn't actually sorry for he'd handled the issue. He was, after all, a magician, and magicians were the kind of people that frequently made those who were honest and upright feel guilty. For that reason, he had no real need to apologize to Lefille, who was just such a person.

Suddenly, a sound caught his attention.

"—Oh, time for a break."

"By that watering hole over there, huh," Lefille said after a quick glance.

By the side of the road, was a small area that had been renovated, although that might have been a bit of an overstatement for an area that simply had some fairly flat stones that were to be used as seating. It appeared to have been designed as a rest stop along the road.

Even though his conversation with Lefille had finally reached a climax, if they had continued further, it would only have brought on more trouble, Suimei thought to himself as he and Lefille followed the others to the rest site.

When suddenly—

"...?"

Had he just heard a shout?

While the sound hadn't come from that far off, it hadn't been that close either. Looking in the direction of the sound, he saw a robed young girl waving from over by the waterfront.

At her side were gathered a few of what looked to be companions. The young girl was a mage, while the others were warriors, swordsmen, and archers.

Judging by the roles they had assembled, they would have passed for a balanced party in a game, drawing extreme interest from Suimei. That said, he certainly was not acquainted with them.

"Those are the companions that took down the semi-giant with me."

"Ohh, so that's them."

Lefille's remark dissipated his confusion. So those are the aforementioned guild adventurers, huh.

"We were on pretty good terms while together. We've had some interactions before."

As Lefille explained, the young girl cupped her hands to her mouth like a megaphone. Judging by her actions, she seemed to have decided they hadn't heard.

"I think they're calling for you."

"Looks like it. I'm going to head over there for a bit," she replied before setting off in their direction.

Before his eyes, a joyous reunion took place.

"Companions, huh..." he murmured.

If he had to be honest with himself, the sight made him somewhat envious. That notwithstanding, this was undoubtedly a path that he had chosen for himself. He didn't have the right to indulge himself in such a feeling.

He exhaled deeply, as if to purge the unnecessary feeling from his body as well, when a sudden sensation caused him to rub his neck.

"..."

...He wasn't sure why, but ever since he'd left Mehter, his back would feel strangely warm at times. It wasn't at all a good feeling – an ill omen perhaps? Any other person would likely have discounted the feeling, deciding that they were simply overthinking things. When Suimei, however, had experienced this in the past, it had always proven to be eerily prescient. He had the feeling his father had once explained the reason for this phenomenon, but try as he might, he just couldn't recall.

...In a flash, he focused on his surroundings, though he was unable to find any hint of someone in chase.

I guess I'm worrying about nothing, he decided, discarding that line of thought as he looked up toward the sky.

The wind was blowing westward. The gentle, refreshing breeze blew past his body, bringing with it the air of this other world – mild and untouched by pollution – setting his heart at ease.

The weather seemed to be giving its blessing, wishing them a smooth and uneventful trip, an atmosphere without the least hint of danger.

And yet, for some unknown reason, as he gazed up at the heavens engulfing the road ahead, he couldn't help but shake the feeling that the wind and the clouds were slowly but surely undergoing a transformation.

Chapter 20: The Whereabouts Of Reiji'S Party

—Just when had this battle begun?

Having been far too focused to care about the passage of time, he'd already lost all sense of what time it currently was.

The light reflecting off his sword's edge flickered from tip to base, and the man – Shana Reiji – dashed ahead in the same direction.

The drawn blade was, of course, aimed at his enemy, who stood before him.

Its gaze was drawn to his fierce attack, and it roared strangely.

Reiji, on the other hand, slashed as if to part it in two.

It was a vertical slash from high to low, a lightning-infused strike using the power bestowed upon him by the Goddess.

His opponent met his attack with a swipe of its claws.

That blow came from a hand many times larger than a human's, one which was seemingly dyed the deepest, darkest pitch.

As their swings collided, the claws interrupted the progress of Reiji's attack.

Claw and sword struggled, locked in stalemate as the sound of hard object colliding with hard object filled the air.

A nervewracking sound that seemed to cry out for victory.

Reiji poured everything he had into his sword, as if to literally suppress his foe beneath his blade.

Locked in stalemate as they were, simply throwing his full power into his attack wouldn't directly defeat his target, but it would exhaust its strength. Thus, as far as Reiji was concerned, this action was currently needed. As long as he was able to continuously accumulate damage on his enemy in this manner, then sooner or later its defense would break, and he would claim victory.

——□□□□□□ ! (TN: No, that's not a font failure; that's intentional.)

That strange howl sounded again, filling his ears.

Despite being capable of human speech, once battle began, it'd reverted to a beast-like state, thus making it apparent just what sort of creature this was.

Concurrent with the roar, sharp, clawed fingers rushed in from his left side, forcing Reiji to duck to avoid the incoming blow.

This attack seemed more like swatting at a hated thing than a targeted

strike, and so it lacked the ability to endanger his life.

It was intended only to halt his movements, a futile attempt to force him to show an opening.

Reiji swung again, an attack fully utilizing the traits of this double-edged blade. A vertical swing which defied the pull of gravity, from down low to up high.

It was a marvelous technique further empowered by wind magic, but his target's beast-like reactions allowed it to avoid the attack at the last moment.

"—O F-flame! Sting Scarlet!"

Suddenly, an incantation, whose stammered words revealed its master's continued unfamiliarity with the situation, was spoken. The voice belonged to Mizuki, offering him protection. The released magic was an intermediate Fire spell, a veritable crimson baptism.

The magic, its invocation keyword and two-verse incantation having been spoken, activated, and curling bands of flame appeared in the air, casting a dense scarlet against the backdrop of the blue sky.

The air exploded.

Everything in his sight was dyed in orange.

The shockwave created by the small explosion rushed toward him.

Without hesitating, he leapt backward. In the next instant, as if to mock its target, the flame changed form, flowing downward as if to swallow the enemy whole.

The moment it touched the enemy, the flame's power exploded. The flame, having found a fuel source – even if that fuel source was a living being – burst, simultaneously igniting the creature contained within its depths.

"I did it!"

Behind him, Mizuki shouted in joy. Her joy, however, was premature. She seemed to have thought her magic had been a fatal strike, but there was yet life still in her target.

Peering into the flame, he observed that their foe was still moving.

Just as he gripped his sword and shifted into a combat stance, the flame magic was blown away.

It looked like it had blown the flame away with a swing of its arm. Standing within the fiery embers left behind, their enemy stood with one arm held outstretched.

Standing there within a heat so intense that it warped the air itself, it emitted an overwhelming pressure.

Having attacked him, regardless of his status as the Hero, this, the sole survivor – its comrades' corpses littering the floor – was his true enemy.

In this scenery filled with the dead, it took a step forward. Reiji eyed his opponent, awaiting an opportunity.

This was no human. No, this was a monster. Even though it was humanoid, this was something other than human – a Mazoku.

Bat-like wings stretched out from its back and twin horns sprouted forth from its head, its entire body the color of rust. Aside from the nose, eyes, and mouth on its face, it bore not the least resemblance to humans. In its entirety, it reminded one of nothing so much as the devils of myth and legend.

The pitch black claws that came flying at him gave off a dull gleam.

The fearsome might of those claws was clearly evidenced by the shattered remnants of the boulders that lay around them.

Coupled with terrific, inhuman arm strength, the claws tipping the five fingers of each hand were like the scythe of the Reaper himself.

The Mazoku cracked a smile, a mocking, condescending grin. Having withstood everything they'd thrown at it so far this battle, it seemed to have developed an unshakable confidence.

In their confrontation so far, Reiji's all had been unable to match his opponent's, whether it be with respect to speed or strength. Accordingly, an expression appeared on Reiji's face, demonstrating his resolve to conclude everything with the next strike.

—The Mazoku took action. A storm of sand was thrown up behind it as it accelerated in his direction. That lightning speed was on an altogether different level from what it had shown previously.

A vision of his body being torn to shreds passed before his eyes: the sheer strength and speed of the attack sending his sword flying, his body powerless in the face of those ferocious claws.

However, that was only presuming that Reiji were to allow the "current situation" to continue, of course—

"Burn Boost..."

Mana began to circulate within his body as fire element reacted to his call.

Power is in my grasp.

That unfeeling invocation filled his body with power. Reinforcement magic.

As the flame enveloped his body, power sprang forth in abundance. That overflowing, omnipotent feeling turned into a brilliant, light that shot toward his enemy.

——■■■■■■■■ ! ?

The expression on the face of the Mazoku, charging toward him, changed.

It had been certain of its victory. That judgment, however, had been incorrect. This was Reiji's first time invoking this reinforcement magic during this confrontation.

"Oooooooooohhhh!"

Despite Reiji's power having shot up, the Mazoku remained confident of its victory. Demanding a price for its arrogance, Reiji ignored the Mazoku's strange cry, and roaring himself, raised his strength another level, and gripping his sword, slashed directly at the head of the incoming enemy.

...Within the dying embers of flame, the tiny particles of dust that had been cast into the air turned to nothingness. Confirming that their enemies were now thoroughly eradicated, Reiji panted for breath.

"Fuu... Looks like today's another victory."



—Before Suimei had left Mehter.

Reiji's party, having left the palace, had not headed directly for their final destination – the Maou – but were instead headed for the United Sadias Autonomous Territories.

It might have seemed to an outsider that they were fleeing from the Maou, but they had a reason for deviating from the purpose for which they had been brought to this world.

Mizuki and Reiji had been summoned from peaceful Japan, and thus could be said to gravely lacking in combat experience. The closest thing they'd ever experienced to real combat had been the training sessions they'd had in the palace.

Subsequently, were they to rely solely on the training they'd received, the power they'd been given through the summoning process, and the magic they had learned, then defeat was essentially an inevitability.

To remedy this deficiency, they were taking a more circuitous route that would enable them to gain the experience they so sorely needed.

This would simultaneously allow them to thin out the Maou's forces, another positive. To both obtain a weapon as well as enhance their skills yet further, they had decided to head first to Sadias and meet one of the Seven Swords who had been stationed there.

They had been ambushed along the way, resulting in the battle that had just concluded.

...His orichalcum blade, drenched in Mazoku blood, glittered brilliantly.

With a flick of his weapon, a first-rate holy sword from Sadias, he dispatched the final Mazoku. Confirming that it had drawn its last breath, he rushed to Mizuki's side.

"Mizuki, are you okay?"

Noticing that her shoulders trembled as she gasped for air with an ashen face, Reiji voiced his concern.

The aftertaste of the battle seemed to linger with her still.

"Oh, yeah. Somehow. It's just that..."

"Just that...?"

"So this... is a battle with the enemy..." Mizuki struggled out, her face still pale.

"...Ah."

Reiji nodded firmly.

To reach this point, they had fought monsters numerous times already. This was a fantasy world with countless undeveloped regions. Along those lines, they had been seen and been attacked by many predators that did not exist in their original world.

Eliminating the threat as you progressed forward seemed to be a matter-of-fact aspect of life in this world. And indeed, they had done just this as they had progressed to this point.

However, never before had Mizuki actually taken part in battle. It had been the judgment of the knights who accompanied them that it was best for her to first familiarize herself with the rigors of battle, and so she had been a passive student until now.

Her proficiency in magic had already reached the point where it rivaled both Titania and himself, and she had even learned advanced-class spells.

But none of that changed the fact that she was still just a young girl from Japan.

In their own world, this could be said to be the demographic with the least to do with battle. Before the issue of combat ability even entered the equation, her resolve to participate in battle was of far greater import.

And so she had needed some time to adjust. This had thus become her first true experience taking part in battle at his side.

"Mizuki. I still think it best that you don't push yourself..."

Once more Reiji expressed the sincere feelings of his heart: he really didn't think it necessary that she fight as well.

Mizuki, however, shook her head, rejecting his concern.

"No. To simply stand by and watch isn't something I can do. It's true that this is my first time, and it's true that the Mazoku are incredibly scary, but the entire reason I came was to help you."

"Mizuki..."

"...Though even if I say that, I have to say... you're amazing. Reiji-kun, it's like you were used to this from the very beginning."

"There's no way that's true. When I first started, I, too, felt that battle is a truly terrible thing. Even now that I'm more used to it, my heart is still pounding in my chest."

Those weren't hollow words meant for Mizuki's comfort – they were true. Just like Mizuki, he hadn't been able to rid himself of the fear that came with battle.

Even though he had come for the express purpose of defeating the Maou, but after encountering the terrifying, inhuman might of "his" soldiers, in his heart, he felt that the task had already exceeded the bounds of his ability. Recently, he hadn't been able to avoid the uncertainty that had gripped his heart and the second-guessing that had filled his thoughts.

...Suimei.

Suddenly, the face of his friend appeared in his mind.

His friend, back at the palace – Yakagi Suimei – had seen the reality of the situation. “Talk is cheap, actually doing it is pretty much impossible,” he’d rebutted. Now it looked like that had indeed been a most accurate assessment of the situation.

When compared with himself, who having attained a modicum of power had thought himself invincible— Actually, it was probably precisely because Suimei had not received the gift of power that he had been able to maintain a clear head and accurately discern just what it was that lay ahead of him on the path that he had chosen.

At the time, he’d allowed his ideals to blind him. Placed in an extraordinary circumstance, using his views developed from the modern world to judge this fantasy world, he’d deceived himself.

The desperate pleas of the people of this world, crying out for a savior, and their flattering words assuring him that he had what it took had given him the feeling that he could do anything. A deceptive, inaccurate feeling.

He’d underestimated the terror that plagued this world.

Though he didn’t want to describe his actions as “foolish”, that was the only word that seemed appropriate to describe what he had done.

If he continued down this path, then perhaps the situation could change. Fear continued to hold him in its grasp – he lacked both

experience and technique. He acted now to strengthen himself, to compensate for his flaws as much as possible before the time came when he would challenge the Maou.

His thoughts, though superficial, were accompanied by a plan.

—That notwithstanding, the fact that he had not thought things through would not disappear, nor would the sin of having gotten that female friend of his wrapped up in all of this.

Sorry...

To Mizuki, her head bowed as she continued to gasp for air, Reiji apologized again. He'd already apologized so many times that it begun to wear on her, and so this time, he apologized only within his heart.

That said, he knew his apology was only to salve his feelings of guilt. Fully aware of his own weakness, Reiji nevertheless continued to do so.

"...Should we go somewhere else?"

"...Sure."

Taking Mizuki, who had raised the idea, with him, Reiji left the corpse-littered battlefield.

"—Mizuki! Are you alright?!" a young girl cried out from nearby, none other than their companion, Titania.

She and the knights with her had dispatched the Mazoku that had appeared elsewhere. They saw her leave the side of a middle-aged knight, and race toward them.

"Mm. I'm okay," Mizuki replied.

"Thank goodness... You don't look to have been injured, right?"

"Because Reiji-kun was with me."

They held each one another tightly as they talked. Relieved smile met courageous smile, finally bringing a sense of calm to the air.

"Good work, Tia."

Standing by their side, Reiji offered words of praise.

"Thank you for your concern, Reiji-sama," she said in reply, bowing.

"It's nothing. Good work on your end too, Gregory-san."

The middle-aged knight who was her constant companion – Gregory – met Reiji's words with his typical solemn demeanor.

"Not at all. I'm simply fulfilling my duties to support Her Highness. You flatter me."

"Oh, don't say that," Reiji said, refuting his modesty.

"You flatter me," was again Gregory's reply, his head bowed.

"—Anyway, Tia. How were things on your end?"

"Right. We finished up just fine. There is not a single Mazoku left over there."

"That's Tia for you. You're so reliable."

"I'm nothing compared with Reiji-sama. That said—"

"What's up?"

"...Our horses were all killed. My sincerest apologies."

"...Oh. Although I feel for the horses that have done their best to carry us until now, as long as you and the others are safe, Tia, that's what matters."

"Reiji-sama..."

Titania was moved by his words of encouragement. Losing their horses would greatly affect their movement from this point on, but Reiji had chosen instead to delight in the fact that no human life had been lost.

Suddenly, a troubled voice spoke.

"...So Titania's already accustomed to battle."

"Yes. While I can't say that my experience is by any means plentiful, I do have some measure of actual combat experience."

Titania's words evoked a strange expression from Mizuki.

"You're an honest-to-goodness princess. Why would you have battle experience?"

"At the time we decided we were going to summon a Hero, I resolved to stay by their side. Thus, I made sure to prepare myself accordingly for this eventuality."

"I get it now..."

Mizuki expressed understanding.

Titania was, after all, the princess of a country. Even though their circumstances were decidedly different, she had expected that Titania would be someone uninvolved with combat, like herself. At the same time, though, she understood that in a world as cruel as this, sooner or later, battle would find you.

Titania had continually taken part in monster hunting parties, fighting

at their side as a magician. Her noble air and dignified bearing notwithstanding, the strength and determination of one who had experienced real combat had always adorned this young woman from the first.

The reason for this she now understood.

Hence her voice had tapered off at the end, a manifestation of her lack of confidence. It was as though she had tripped and fallen behind those walking by her side, although given Mizuki's background, such a thing was only to be expected. Recognizing Mizuki's disappointment, Titania offered words of reassurance.

"Mizuki. Please don't feel so down. When I first started, I was just like you. Or rather, worse by far."

"...Really?"

"Absolutely. When I first tried to acclimatize myself to battle, I went through just what you're going through now. At the end of my first battle, I fell right on my rear, collapsing on the ground."

"Really? But you're so familiar with fighting?"

"That's because I've already accumulated a fair amount of combat experience. Because I knew that if I was going to accompany the Hero on his travels, I couldn't just continue being like that."

"And that's why you're like this now?"

"Exactly. That's pretty much it."

"Okay," Mizuki nodded strongly, her unease more or less dispelled.

Watching the two support one another, Reiji couldn't help but feel his spirits lift.

Perhaps things really would work out.

Mizuki, who had until just previously somewhat held herself in contempt, seemed to be alright now. Her sense of self-awareness hadn't fully ripened yet, but she had nonetheless managed to once again muster up her courage.

It was then, with the mood as it was...

Who knew why, but Mizuki frowned again, something bothering her once more. Just when her mood was finally improving. What just happened?

"I wonder if Suimei-kun is doing okay..."

With that, Reiji understood what was worrying her.

And so.

"Suimei, huh. He definitely said that he was planning to leave the palace in just a bit..."

"Hmm. Outside the city... The districts immediately out of the city should be just fine, but there are many dangerous areas along the road or in the wilderness. Even if he leaves the city, as long as he doesn't stray too far, he shouldn't have to worry about monsters."

"Is that so? Even though he rejected the invitation to join us, I don't think he'll travel alone. That said, without the blessing of the Goddess that you have, Reiji-sama, or the instruction in magic that you have, Mizuki, I worry just as you do. If he leaves the city and runs into a monster, I don't imagine he'll be able to defend himself," Titania said with a strained look.

It was just as she'd said. He didn't think it likely that Suimei would travel alone, but as he thought of his material needs – food and water, the distance he'd have to travel, and the danger he'd have to face, he understood why the girls were worried.

That notwithstanding, there was still a slight difference between the way he and the girls saw things.

"No, Suimei will be fine."

"...? Why do you say that, Reiji-sama?"

"Suimei knows kenjutsu. Even if he wanders outside, I'm certain he'll overcome any obstacles with ease."

Titania was shocked by this unexpected answer.

"Suimei knows how to use a sword?"

"Yep."

Reiji reaffirmed this fact as he watched the pair. He was surprised to see that Mizuki seemed taken aback as well, her gaze sweeping over to meet him as she shook her head as if to say that that this was the first she'd ever heard of it.

Yes, Suimei knew kenjutsu, though due to the legal restrictions placed on the practice back home, he'd likely never wielded an actual sword. Either way, Suimei was undoubtedly a swordsman.

"But Reiji-kun, Suimei-kun isn't a member of the kendo club?" Mizuki asked.

As she'd said, Suimei was not a member of the kendo club, but rather of the so-called "go-home club". From what Suimei had told him, he often had to travel abroad for family reasons, and thus was unable to participate normally in club activities.

Titania, who was obviously unaware of what it meant that he was a member of the go-home club, was visibly puzzled, so Mizuki explained.

Reiji spoke next.

"From what I understand, he doesn't take part in club activities, but rather trains at a dojo near his house."

"Hmm? There was a dojo near there...?"

"Yeah. A dojo that teaches self-defense," he answered succinctly, the map of their city passing through his mind as he spoke.

With that, Mizuki seemed to suddenly recall a certain location.

"Oh, that place? Isn't that a self-defense class intended for women? It's really well-known, but from what I've heard, it's not a kendo dojo?"

"Yep. The sign says that they teach self-defense, but originally they're a dojo that practices an ancient martial art. Various volunteers will pass down different kinds of teachings."

"Really?! It's that kind of place?!"

"That's what Suimei said, anyway."

"No way... There's a few girls in our class who go there... Ancient martial arts..."

His thorough explanation notwithstanding, Mizuki seemed nevertheless thoroughly surprised. She'd known they taught self-defense, but she hadn't realized the extent of it.

To be fair, that such a place existed nearby was beyond expectation. When he'd first learned of it, he'd shouted in surprise.

"Does that mean that Suimei-kun is a successor of an ancient martial art, like a character from a manga?"

"That seems to be the case, yeah."

This time, Titania was the one to speak.

"From what you've said, Suimei seems to be a martial artist."

"Mm. That said, our world is a peaceful place, and you can't compare him with someone who's learned combat over here. Either way, though, Suimei's a swordsman. That's for sure."

"I see. My impression of him was that he was thoroughly unacquainted with violence. This certainly comes as quite a surprise."

"Definitely. Just looking at him, you can't tell at all, but from what I know, his skills should be at quite an amazing level."

The truth was, when it came to the precise details, Reiji wasn't all that clear himself either.

He'd never visited the aforementioned dojo, and although they'd fought thugs side by side, Suimei had naturally never used his swordsmanship at

those times. Thus Reiji had never actually seen Suimei's skills.

Titania, however, seemed certain that Reiji was being overly optimistic.

"Even still, I don't think that's enough to determine that he'll be just fine," she rebutted.

Her voice held a noticeable trace of unease, perhaps because she'd imagined what kind of troubles he might find himself facing. Plus, he had to admit, swordsmanship alone would not be enough to guarantee his safety.

In truth, Suimei had never before fought a monster, and whether or not techniques developed for use on humans would be of any use against monsters remained to be seen.

Subsequently, it seemed impossible to guarantee that Suimei would be fine.

However.

"You're still not getting the whole picture. Suimei is the kind of guy who almost never shows any openings... While his behavior can be pretty unorthodox at times, he's fundamentally a very cautious person."

"You mean to say that he should be able to escape even if he runs into monsters? From what I've heard, though, the vast majority of people simply freeze on the spot when they run into and are stared down by a monster."

"That, huh. If it's Suimei we're talking about, that kind of oppressive atmosphere might as well be the caress of a gentle breeze."

"Really..."

Mizuki frowned, unable to believe his words. It was because she now thoroughly understood just how dangerous this world truly was that she now wore such an expression.

Nevertheless, it was true that Suimei was the kind of person who didn't seem to know what the meaning of the word fear was. Once before, he'd been surrounded by a group of hoodlums. His response? Without the least hint of anxiety, he'd simply said, "What? That's it?" When faced with violence, from start to finish, he'd never lost the least bit of calm. —But enough on that for now.

Moreover, as far as Reiji knew, he never took his enemies on directly, either. To be frank, he was the kind of person who enjoyed exploiting your weaknesses. On that note, when it came to wheeling and dealing, Suimei was many times his superior.

"Anyway, that's why I'm not really all that worried."

"If you say so, Reiji-sama..."

Declaring that she wouldn't mind the issue any longer, Titania dropped the topic.

Mizuki, however, suddenly turned, seemingly having thought of something else.

"...So, Reiji-kun. Has Suimei-kun ever said anything like 'I'm Yakagi Suimei, a swordsman of the such-and-such school!' Or has he ever shown off some amazing sword skills?"

"Huh? No, that's a bit..."

"We're talking about ancient martial arts here! Ancient martial arts! Skills that completely overpower the kind taught today, supreme techniques developed solely for the purpose of taking lives!"

Judging by her insane fervor, just what kind of delusions did Mizuki have about ancient martial arts? Although when it came to the nature of these techniques, it couldn't be denied that they were meant to kill, that didn't guarantee that they were completely a level above current martial arts.

Anyway, from what he'd heard from Suimei, there weren't really any major differences between what he'd learned and what was currently taught as kendo.

However, Tia looked to believe Mizuki completely.

"K-killing techniques...?"

"Yep! Exactly, Tia! Ancient Japanese martial arts were designed with the assumption that a fight could break out at any moment. Also! Both sides

strike at the same time and victory and defeat are determined with a single strike! We're talking about swordsmanship that has reached the level of gods!"

"...!"

Overwhelmed by Mizuki's words and intense expression, Titania gulped.

Anyway, putting all these ridiculous things together.. What kind of demonic, Asura-like martial art was this supposed to be?

"...Granted, I don't think Suimei-kun is likely to have attained such a level."

"O-oh..."

That was indeed the truth.

Some moments after Mizuki's tirade had ended, for God only knows what reason, she suddenly puffed up her cheeks, pouting.

"Hmph! Suimei-kun is definitely a chuunibyou! Hiding his true colors like that— How do I put this? It's so sneaky!"

So that's what had made her mad. It wasn't so much that she was angry at the fact that he'd hidden his abilities, as that she was jealous of how he'd secretly gone and learned techniques of this nature.

However.

"E-even if you say that, Suimei doesn't say any chuuni things like you, Mizuki, so you can't just assume that he's a chuunibyou... Oh."

It was only after he'd spoken the forbidden word that he realized what he'd said.

Looking at Mizuki, he saw her smile take on a sinister undertone.

"Re~i~ji~kun~"

"S-s-sorry! It just slipped out!"

"You promised! Forgetting is absolutely not allowed!"

"R-right."

Indeed, he'd previously sworn never to mention that again. Mizuki's past which she wanted desperately to remain in the past. Using her words, it was a girl's "secret garden."

Titania, on the other hand—

"Mizuki. What does 'chuunibyou' mean?"

“Uwa?! ...That, um, well...”

“What kind of thing is it? Don’t tell me it’s some sort of terrible illness?”
(TN: The last character (病) in chuunibyou (中二病), means illness or sickness.)

“Y-y-yeah! YEAH! That’s exactly it! It’s something that the vast majority of preteens in our world suffer from! A vicious illness that leaves terrifying aftereffects!”

Titania’s question threw Mizuki into a panic, and her frantic answer was accompanied by wild gestures as she attempted to lie the issue away.

Even though Mizuki seemed determined to prevent discussion of this topic at all costs, but to be quite honest, this was really just reaping the consequences of her own actions.

Nevertheless, she succeeded in her attempt to deceive Titania, and that line of discussion came to an end.

Instead, Titania’s expression suddenly turned serious.

“There’s another thing we need to worry about, actually. It concerns the Mazoku.”

“Yeah, now that you mention it, that’s right. What were the Mazoku doing in a place like this anyway?”

"Mazoku, huh..."

"Yes."

Titania nodded.

Just as Mizuki had pointed out, this had been troubling her from the very moment that the Mazoku had first appeared and attacked them. Now that the Mazoku had been taken care of and things had calmed down, they finally had the luxury of time to consider the issue.

This was likely the first time this topic had been raised.

Thinking back to the Mazoku they had just fought against, Mizuki looked uneasy. Reiji proceeded to speak again, answering the question that he himself had posed.

"The Mazoku have already invaded Nelferia, haven't they?"

"I-is that really it?"

"Mm. If you think about it, that seems to be the eventuality with the highest likelihood, no? The presence of the Mazoku here would seem to suggest this."

As Reiji voiced his conjecture, Mizuki's face froze.

That was only natural. She still wasn't used to battle yet, and was now confronted with the possibility that battle with the Mazoku would again occur in the near future. The Mazoku were on an entirely different level from monsters and magical beasts after all.

Mizuki's magic had already shown itself capable of destroying monsters. When it came to the Mazoku however, it was possible that she wouldn't even be able to burn them. That last Mazoku had been just such an example.

So of course she felt uneasy.

However, Titania rejected that hypothesis.

"—No. At least for now, I can't say that the likelihood of that having happened is all that high."

"What makes you say that, Tia?"

"Well, as you've said, Reiji-sama, we are now within the borders of the Empire. Running into the Mazoku here would certainly give rise to the thoughts you have just expressed. However, in reality, the Mazoku haven't done much after attacking Noshias. In order to get here, they would have had to first pass through two other countries and a mountain range. A reckless march like that is completely unprecedented."

Mizuki agreed with Titania.

"That's right. Even if they forced their army to march all the way here,

it'd just mean they were cut off from the others, anyway."

"Considering that they didn't attack the other two countries while coming in this far, if they wanted to attacked Mehter... Well, that should be impossible, right?"

"Correct."

Titania nodded. Just as she'd said, a large-scale troop movement of this nature which completely isolated itself was simply inviting disaster. Typically, when mobilizing a large number of troops, care would first be taken to ensure the existence of supply lines and an open path for reinforcements, and only then would action be taken.

Taking action without ensuring that these logistical requirements had been met would only result in your army being stranded. Being cut off from all assistance in this manner would eventually result in being surrounded by your enemies. This style of battle was extremely hazardous but not advantageous.

And yet.

"And yet, it is undeniable that the Mazoku are here. Even if the Mazoku army itself hasn't been able to penetrate this far, it is nevertheless an indisputable fact that the Mazoku are here."

"That's true. That's a real problem, isn't it..."

"Spies... Any possibility they're spies?"

"Spies...?"

"They're, um, what we call secret agents in our world."

"Oh, I see. But—"

"Yeah, I don't think that's it either."

Reiji's answer, given before Tia could finish, left Mizuki confused.

"Why?"

"If they were involved in that sort of task, they wouldn't have ambushed us. If they were spies, they would likely be charged with covert ops around the periphery. Abandoning their mission just to ambush us doesn't make any sense."

"Right. Especially since they were isolated here in small numbers, there was no guarantee they'd actually be able to kill us."

"Yeah. It's conceivable that they would have attacked us if they had known that this was the Hero's party, but it didn't look like they knew."

Indeed, the battle just now had been perfectly timed. That it had been a trap was undeniable. If the plan had truly been intended to take down the Hero, then their numbers had been far too few. For that reason, it was highly unlikely they were aware of his identity as the Hero.

"But if that's true, then I don't get it," Titania mumbled to herself, her brow furrowed as she tried to puzzle out the conundrum before them.

Reiji turned to the middle-aged knight, "What do you think, Gregory-san?"

In response to his question, these seasoned veteran bowed his head in apology.

"...I'm very sorry, but try as I might, I can't understand how the Mazoku think."

"Is there anything that stands out to you? Any detail, large or small, would help."

"...Yuusha-dono. Rather, I think it more important that we first leave this place."

Gregory, who had not offered a concrete opinion until this point, suddenly seriously suggested they retreat.

Did something prompt that thought?

"—Is that because there are other Mazoku in the area?"

"N-no. I don't think so..."

"...?"

Looks like that wasn't it.

Reiji frowned.

Something seems off.

Gregory, having just denied that there were Mazoku in the area, nevertheless seemed pressed for some reason. Reiji had originally thought that he'd made the suggestion after having sensed danger. Seeing as that wasn't the case, however, just what had prompted that reaction from him? If there were no Mazoku here, then why was it so important that they leave with such haste?

Titania spoke next.

"Gregory. Even though I agree with the need to move somewhere safe, but our priority is still to thoroughly understand what the Mazoku were trying to do here. Acting without careful consideration is even more likely to create dangerous circumstances."

"...As you say, Your Highness."

Gregory straightforwardly bowed his head in acknowledgment.

It looked like he'd accepted the matter. Nevertheless, Reiji couldn't

shake the feeling that he'd heard something in the man's words, a trace of impatience and anxiety there. Just what was causing it...

"...Tia. Is it possible that there are Mazoku outside of those from the north?" Reiji asked, again exploring other avenues of consideration.

If there were other Mazoku, separate from those in the north, then it wouldn't be impossible to imagine that they'd found their way here.

"No. I don't think that likely. With the power of the heroes previously summoned, the Mazoku of this world were forced into the north. There shouldn't be any anywhere else... If the legends that have been passed down are correct, that is."

"Legends?"

"The record describing the past efforts of heroes mentions it. After the Hero defeated the Maou, the forces of each nation seized the opportunity to annihilate the Mazoku. The remaining Mazoku were forced deep into the harsh environment of the far north... That very last piece of land proved resistant to human attack, and at long last, humanity gave up on the goal of hunting the Mazoku to extinction."

"I see..."

If that was true, then it was indeed impossible for the Mazoku to exist elsewhere.

But in that case.

"There are so many things that don't make sense."

"Yeah."

Reiji echoed Mizuki's exasperated murmur. Their discussion had proved fruitless, and they were left without so much as a clue.

At that moment, they heard the sound of someone running toward them from far off.

And then.

"Y-Yuusha-sama!"

In order to make their group aware of his presence, a voice called out. The voice's owner was a young knight assigned with the same task as Gregory: providing support for Reiji who had yet to accustom himself to the ways of their world.

In order to maintain contact with the palace, members of the party would at times leave the group, undertaking the responsibility of playing messenger. This time, it seemed to have been his turn, substituting Gregory who had done it before...

The young knight dismounted from his horse before bowing.

"Rofrey-san."

"I have returned."

"Rofrey, you're not hurt, are you?"

Titania's casual question took Rofrey by surprise, and he stammered, "A-a knight like me made the Princess worry—"

"Rofrey."

"Y-yes! Sorry, but before that, over there was..."

Gregory cleared his throat, sending the younger knight into a panic, after which he finally managed to recover from his state of incoherent rambling.

Reiji answered the young man's frantic gaze.

"Oh, you saw it. The Mazoku attacked just a while ago, so we eliminated them."

"That was all of them?!"

"That" was referencing the corpses of the Mazoku who had fallen in the battle, which it seemed Rofrey had seen, judging by his startled outburst.

Even though he'd already seen it, he was still making a big fuss about it.

Definitely a truly expressive person.

"Y-yeah."

"As expected of Reiji-sama! ...Oh, sorry. My apologies."

...He'd practically been shouting. Would it be better to describe him as a lively person or someone who wore his emotions on his sleeve?

Either way, looking at him, it was clear there was something he wanted to say.

"What's the matter? You've been making a huge fuss ever since you got here. And where's Luke? You two left together to meet up with the communications personnel. Why hasn't he returned?" Gregory inquired.

"Sir. I'll now make my report, which includes the aforementioned item."

Rofrey took a deep breath and then continued.

"Although this is a bit sudden, but we need to leave this area immediately."

"And why is that?"

"The Mazoku general seems to have already broken through the countries of Thoria and Shardock and is even now at the northern border

of Aster.”

His face stiff, Rofrey gave this stunning report. Thoria and Shardock were countries to the north of Nelferia and Sadias...

“What!? Are you serious, Rofrey?!”

“Y-yes. That is what I was told by the communications officer anyway...”

Rofrey shrank, intimidated by the pressure he felt from Titania as the young lady pressed him for information.

However, Reiji heard something in his words that bothered him.

“Rofrey-san. Just now you said, ‘seems to have’. What do you mean by that?”

Reiji pursued the matter further. From the very beginning, Rofrey’s words had been permeated by a certain air of vagueness.

Had the Mazoku made their way into Aster or not? From his words, you couldn’t be sure.

“Well, that’s because this is according to intel provided by the troops patrolling the border. They chanced upon traces of something and came to this conclusion. That’s why I can’t be sure...”

"Traces of what?"

"Footprints and remnants of magical power that don't belong to any monster."

Titania stepped in next.

"So no one's actually seen the Mazoku general, correct?"

"That's correct. The enemy seems to be taking care to hide its movements. There have not been any witnesses or reports of anything having come under attack."

Hesitantly, Mizuki expressed her thoughts on the issue.

"...From what we know of them, shouldn't they be rampaging?"

Everyone nodded. It was just as Mizuki had said. As enemies of humanity, if they had truly mobilized their troops to the point of having broken through national boundaries to reach this point, then the purpose of this sneak attack had likely been to create chaos.

Although it wasn't for certain that there weren't any other ulterior motives to the attack, but if even the enemy general had been called to arms, then other possibilities seemed unlikely. The most effective use of large numbers of troops was to fight a war, after all.

And yet.

"The Mazoku have not as of yet made an actual large-scale offensive against this country, nor has the existence of their army actually even been confirmed yet. The reliability of this intel is quite questionable..."

"Perhaps the Mazoku who attacked us were the ones in question?"

When Rofrey had become aware of the attack by the Mazoku just earlier, he had combined this knowledge with the intel he'd been carrying to reach this hypothesis. To be more specific, the Mazoku who had just attacked were a part of the enemy general's forces.

That being the case, his shock when running across the Mazoku corpses just earlier was entirely understandable.

"Yes, that's what I think as well," Rofrey replied, somewhat unhappily.

"So where's Luke?" Gregory interrupted.

"He's escorting the communication officer to the rendezvous point, and then back to Mehter. If all goes according to plan, he will meet back up with us in Empire territory two days from now."

"I understand."

"Things have taken a turn for the worst," Titania said, looking thoroughly stressed.

"If that's the case, then our actions should already have been exposed to the Mazoku. Anyway, according to what just happened..."

Indeed, their question from earlier had now been answered. The ambush just now was not a coincidence, but something that had been planned in advance.

In that case, how to explain the current situation?

"Is it perhaps that the Mazoku are aware of the Hero summoning but are not familiar with the details? That would make sense if we interpret the earlier attack as a sort of forced reconnaissance."

"Ah..."

"That makes sense. In other words, they're trying to locate the Hero's party."

"Right."

That's right.

If the Mazoku general's presence had become known, then it was possible that the Hero would retreat. In order to avoid this, he had acted in secret and split his troops into small, exploratory raiding bands. This perfectly explained the grasp of the situation that Mizuki, Titania, and the others had.

...But still...

If that was the case, then each unit would undoubtedly have a person in charge of relaying information to the others. However, the raiding party just now clearly did not.

Looks like it's still too early to make a final conclusion...

In any event, what was of greatest importance now was determining whether or not their current whereabouts had already been revealed.

In contrast to his own concerns, Mizuki raised another.

"If the Mazoku are in the area, then we're in trouble. Rofrey-san's horse aside, the others were all killed by the Mazoku..."

"Yes. The worst possible situation may have just occurred, and it might not be one we can escape. We might just have to face it head-on."

"Rofrey. How many Mazoku are there estimated to be?"

"Over a thousand, I'm afraid..."

"One thousand..."

"...That's..."

Mizuki was left speechless, as was Reiji. That was undoubtedly a number which they had not the slightest hope of defeating in a direct confrontation.

Even the Mazoku from earlier had taken a good deal of time to finish off. Were they to be surrounded by an army of a thousand, they wouldn't be able to last long at all.

Just then, Suimei's words once again echoed in his mind.

Mizuki, too, showed a pained expression.

"T-then shouldn't we leave right now?"

"No. Wandering around aimlessly is not a good idea. Other than my horse, we have none others. If we don't decide our destination in advance, and carefully plan out food and water rations, then..."

Rejecting Mizuki's panicked words, Rofrey's assertion was correct.

They all nodded. Suddenly, Titania turned to the seasoned knight at their side, who for some reason, had not offered one word of advice during this entire discussion.

"Gregory. What do you think we should do?"

"No..."

His face grim, his answer vague, Gregory's manner had been strange ever since the topic of the Mazoku had come up.

...No, wait just a moment. What was it Gregory said before all this?

While everyone had been discussing the Mazoku, he'd looked strangely anxious the entire time—

Everyone turned to Gregory, whose attempts to hide the strange atmosphere had failed.

"Perhaps... it's time..." he muttered weakly.

"Gregory?"

"...When it comes to what we were discussing, there's no need to worry."

What in the world was this?

...His face taut as he spoke, the words he uttered next became the catalyst for the first uproar that would shake their party since their journey began.

Chapter 21: Meeting The Enemy

Several days after Suimei had left the capital with the caravan.

Their journey had gone off without a hitch. They had encountered neither robbers nor monsters, and even inclement weather – which would slow their pace drastically – had not occurred. Instead, they'd simply continued along their way, staying at small villages and post stations along the road.

If there was anything to be unhappy about, it was only the small portion sizes for meals. This, however, was obviously something they had been aware of before even setting out, and so it wasn't really worth mentioning.

Soon after, they safely passed through the mountain pass that was commonly referred to as the most difficult part of the journey, and the path they were now taking was at quite steep indeed.

From what he'd heard from the merchants in the caravan, they still had about a third of their trip to go. Once they'd passed through the foothills and a large basin, they'd find themselves at their destination.

—The differences between their worlds notwithstanding, it seemed some things were the same everywhere. Adapting to sudden changes in environment was something just as difficult for the people of this world as for those of his own.

For just as the caravan had left the foothills and reached the forest at the foot of the mountain—

The forest was fairly sparse, and on a typical sunny day, the light of the sun would easily break through the forest canopy. Today, however, there was a thick cloud cover that left them feeling morose.

The scene, a gloomy gray that stretched as far as the eye could see, impacted their mood greatly.

In this situation, where it seemed that they could be targeted at any moment, an atmosphere of danger suddenly descended.

...Lefille, walking with Suimei, suddenly spoke.

"...Suimei-kun. Have you noticed?"

"Yeah, I have."

As he'd said, he had already sensed the faint presences in their proximity.

In fact, ever since they'd left the foothills and set foot in this forest, his neck had begun to burn, an ill omen. Afterward, he'd sensed an undisguised surge of mana, as if in preparation for an upcoming battle, radiating from a magical place nearby.

Well, actually, that wasn't an entirely accurate description... Because

that magical force seemed to be heading straight for them.

From this, he could tell that an unknown something, possessing a great amount of mana, was about to ambush them...

"...Hey, is this a monster? It doesn't seem like a person..." Suimei asked Lefille, while keeping a guarded eye on his flank.

Suimei's question was provoked by the waves of mana he felt emanating from the creature. From what he could feel, this was an existence far from human.

Lefille's answer came with certainty.

"No, this is no monster. It's Mazoku."

"Wha..."

Why would that name pop up here, of all places? Although it'd been a topic of conversation earlier in the journey, had there really been some connection after all?

However.

"...You were pretty certain just now. Is there really no possibility of it being something other than the Mazoku?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I know them inside and out. There's no way I would make a mistake about this."

"...Is that so?"

"...Yes."

Suimei asked again, not understanding what was running through the young girl's mind, but this time, her answer was even stiffer.

As Lefille answered, a grim look on her face, the caravan came to a sudden stop. Perhaps someone else had noticed the presence following them.

Before long, they heard the sound of footsteps, and an adventurer dressed like a warrior ran toward them. The look on his face was undeniably bitter, perhaps owing to the inauspicious circumstances.

He waved at Suimei and the others.

"Hey—"

Just as the adventurer was about to speak, Lefille nodded.

"Yeah, we've already noticed."

"Oh? I-I see."

"Yes."

Lefille's brief confirmation allowed the adventurer to cut short his explanation, and jump straight to the main topic.

"—Alright, that's good. The magicians tell us we have monsters headed this way. Galeo-san's decision is to meet them here."

...It seemed that unlike Lefille, the others thought the approaching presences were but monsters.

Whichever they were, the truth would soon become apparent once they arrived.

Other adventurers, however, posed a question in response.

"We're meeting the attack here?"

"Yes. Bodyguards are to participate in the battle as well. Is there a problem?"

"No, that's fine with us, but what about the merchants?"

Just as the surprised adventurers asked, this was a concern.

As bodyguards, they, of course, had the resolve to take part in battle.

But what would happen to the merchants they had been hired to protect?

Generally speaking, in order to avoid having non-combat personnel drawn into the fight, it would be best to have them hide somewhere safe. Although this was the appropriate thought, but in the current situation, just where in their proximity was the best place to go?

They'd left the foothills and just entered the forest. The terrain here was flat, but desolate. There wasn't anywhere nearby that would make for a good hiding spot.

Taking their current location into consideration, what should they do? In answering this question, Lefille responded with a question of her own.

"What if we seized the initiative by taking the fight to them?"

"No, that's not an option."

"Then, what about sending the merchants deeper into the forest?"

"That's no good either."

"...?"

All suggestions were shot down by the other adventurers.

As a countermeasure, Lefille's suggestion to prevent the enemy's advance by lying in wait and intercepting them early was likely the best plan for the given situation.

"...It looks like there are monsters ahead of us as well. Since there are also monsters coming from the side, it's highly likely there are more coming from behind us as well. If worst comes to worst, we'll find ourselves surrounded. In that case, rather than having the merchants move carelessly, it's best if we keep them somewhere we can keep an eye on them while we fight. ...That's our judgment," the stiff-faced adventurer replied.

So that was it. If there was nowhere to run, then they'd just have to defend this spot. That decision was reasonable enough.

"Who will be responsible for attacking?" Lefille asked.

"Hmm? There shouldn't be a need for that...?"

"And why not? You just pointed out the possibility that we might get surrounded. If this were indeed to occur, then wouldn't we need someone to break the siege?"

"Huh? W-we don't have any plans to break through the enemy's attack or anything. As long as we defend carefully, then it's not like monsters can really do anything, right?"

"...I see."

Faced with resistance from the adventurer, Lefille didn't continue. Her willingness to give up seemed to arise out of a desire to avoid a pointless debate. Nevertheless, Suimei could tell from her tone that she was frustrated.

"Breaking the siege, is it...?"

Silently, Suimei began to play out the upcoming battle in his mind. The most effective way to break a siege would be a focused offensive concentrated on a single point. When besieged, passively focusing on defense was something your enemies wanted to happen. Regardless of how effective or ineffective it might eventually prove to be, it was nonetheless an absolute necessity.

This time, there wasn't a real need to forcibly break a "siege" per se; rather, by separating, and devoting a portion of their forces to freely attack the enemies surrounding them, they should be able to easily throw the enemy formation into disarray.

Lefille had clearly thought things through, else she wouldn't have raised the point.

...That said, even if it was the most effective plan of action, it also

required a certain degree of manpower.

As the saying goes, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. If they were to attempt an attack in a situation where they couldn't even necessarily guarantee they had enough people to defend, that'd be putting the cart before the horse.

"We'll end the conversation here. I need to get back to my position. I leave the cargo in your care."

With that, the adventurer prepared to leave.

Lefille, however, called out, stopping him.

"Can I say something else?"

"...What?"

"What's coming at us from the front is still unclear, but what's coming at us from the side are definitely not monsters, but Mazoku. Please inform Galeo-san of this detail."

"Huh? W-why do you know something like that?"

"Experience. This presence doesn't belong to any monster."

Lefille's declaration elicited a doubting groan from the adventurer.

He stared at Lefille for a moment.

"...I understand. I'll let him know that that's a possibility."

The adventurer gave a faultless reply before leaving in a hurry.

Watching him leave, Suimei sighed, and mumbled to himself.

"...I didn't go with Reiji and the others precisely because I never wanted to fight the Mazoku."

Suimei thought back to the choice he'd made back in the palace. In an attempt to avoid an unreasonable, reckless war with an unknown enemy as well as to find a way to return safely home, he'd parted ways with Reiji and the others.

And yet, in the end, here he was, forced to fight them anyway.

Even if it wasn't entirely for certain that they were about to face the Mazoku, but if that was indeed the case, then the irony of the situation was simply staggering. His attempt to stave off fate's design had proven entirely fruitless. Suimei felt as though an unseen malice was directing his path.

"Something wrong?"

Had she heard his mutters?

"It's nothing. I was just hoping that this trip would go smoothly."

"Suimei-kun. When you travel, you should always be ready for danger. You won't get anywhere with a half-hearted resolve. Even more so in the world as it is of late. You would do well to remember this."

"...No matter where I go, danger just has to follow, doesn't it?"

"And we exist precisely to combat that danger, do we not?"

"That's true. That's the kind of job we accepted, after all," Suimei replied honestly.

A fearless grin appeared on the young girl's face.

A smile directed to a comrade-at-arms on the eve of battle.

Their short talk over, Lefille removed the bundle from her back and unpacked its contents with practiced ease.

Within the unfolded cloth lay a gigantic sword.

It was around a hundred eighty centimeters in length, from the tip of the blade to the bottom of the hilt. The hilt curved into a massive, triangular sword guard, which – together with the blade itself – measured around fifteen centimeters wide. It had the wide blade of a claymore combined with the length of a zweihander. It was not made in

the Western fashion, the Japanese fashion, or the Chinese fashion, but in the style of this other world. Its silver-red body couldn't be seen as ostentatious, but it was nonetheless undeniably beautiful.

Lefille swung it several times with a single hand, though all he saw was the reflection of the sun peeking through the clouds as it bounced off the blade. He hadn't the slightest clue where the strength to brandish this sword came from, or how she was doing it, but on one thing he was clear – this was something she was used to.

Suddenly Lefille, for some reason or another, walked toward the side – the direction the incoming Mazoku were in.

Was that because that enormous weapon couldn't safely be wielded to its fullest extent without first placing a certain amount of distance between herself and friendlies?

However, Lefille's next action refuted this idea. Without looking back, she continued to advance in the direction of the enemy.

"H-hey, Lefille?"

"—Suimei-kun. I'm sorry, but I'm going to seize the initiative and go on the offensive."

"Hey, don't just leave like that... Is it really okay for you to just act on your own? Anyway, they're still a little ways off, wouldn't it be best for you to at least consult with Galeo-san first?"

Lefille shook her head, her eyes closed.

"No. Look around."

As she spoke, her head turned. Suimei followed her gaze, sweeping over their surroundings.

Because of the current situation, the other members of the caravan were frantically running to and fro, busy preparing.

"...?"

"The other adventurers and bodyguards have completely devoted themselves to defense. Do you understand now?"

"Ah, yeah, I guess. We did just talk about it, after all."

"This isn't going to work."

"Mm..."

Her denial seemed to say that the caravan's decision for a countermeasure was ill-advised.

Because of this, Suimei was reminded of what she had said earlier.

"...By that, you're referring to the need to take the fight to the Mazoku

or whatever?"

"Yes," Lefille nodded. "The Mazoku are creatures that consider plunder, pillage, and murder to be the correct way to live. Accordingly, their desire to attack is intense beyond words. If we focus only on defense, that will only whet their appetites. If we truly plan to resist, then dedicating ourselves to defense is not an option."

"Simply defending is inviting danger, that I fully understand. However, running straight into the enemy formation isn't necessarily the best tactic either. Focusing only on defense is dangerous, to be sure, but going on the offensive is also dangerous, no? That said, assuming we truly are surrounded, then even though the current tactics we're employing can be seen as appropriate, but I also recognize that it's not the wisest choice," Suimei said, hoping to dispel Lefille's desire to charge off alone.

Lefille seemed stubbornly attached to the notion of seizing the initiative. The problem was that, just as the adventurer had said earlier, such a plan would only prove effective with sufficient manpower behind it.

As a person from another world, he'd never foreseen the situation arising where he'd be forced to fight the Mazoku as a guard, and thus determining the best way to allocate their limited resources was beyond his ability.

Lefille, however, firmly rejected his words.

"And so we stick to defense? You can't even call that a plan."

“No. No matter what, Lefille, you can’t just attack the enemy by yourself.”

Suimei wasn’t looking down on her.

That said, it was a fact that he wasn’t sure exactly how strong she really was. As a magician, he didn’t have the experience necessary to gauge how strong a swordsman really was just by outer appearance alone.

But even though he wasn’t sure how strong she was, they also were not sure of the enemy’s strength or numbers. Precisely owing to the fact that there remained so many unknown factors, it was unwise to be overly optimistic.

Lefille nodded, seeming to understand how Suimei felt. But—

“What you said is very true. But, and I believe I’ve said this already, I know them through and through. There’s no way I’d fail to understand their strength, and—”

“And?”

As she spoke, a dark aura seemed to emanate from her, giving him goosebumps.

“...I’m going to kill them all. Every last one!”

—Her valiant, beautiful face was suddenly shrouded by a dark shadow

which had nothing to do with the clouds. The face she showed now was the dark side of this ever-righteous swordswoman.

The eye that had not been covered by shadow suddenly burned with a crimson glow that radiated searing hatred, a murderous glare that seemed as if to pierce through the heart of an enemy that was not present.

...Again. What in the world had happened to her? Just what kind of fate did the beings known as the Mazoku share with this young woman?

"...They're that hateful?"

"Yes. They are a sin. An evil that knows only wickedness from birth until death. They mock the weak, torment the grieving, and feast upon despair. Creatures beyond any hope of salvation. And that's why they need to be exterminated. And that's why I'll destroy them with these two hands."

"..."

The dark resolve in her words shattered any retort Suimei might have offered.

He wasn't sure when, but Suimei was reminded that he'd heard before that the Mazoku were beyond forgiveness. When they had destroyed the kingdom in the north, they had taken no captives, only lives.

"And there you have it."

"A-ah."

Suddenly, the air between them changed. Lefille, as if apologizing for the somber mood she'd wrought, revealed a brilliant smile.

"Suimei-kun, thank you. But please, don't worry about me. Just as discussed, I leave the cargo in your care. Goodbye."

In the blink of an eye, the young girl vanished into the forest depths.

Her certainty that there was no danger in her facing the enemy alone seemed born of experience.

However, at this point in time, there was no way for him to accurately evaluate whether or not her judgment had been the correct one. If she could do it, then great, and if not, then so be it. Time would tell.

...Fast.

That said, simply judging by what he could see of her movements, he felt that she would be fine. Even though the terrain was rough, the weight she carried enormous, and her speed like lightning, she seemed completely unaffected by the environment, and her movements were steady and smooth. As long as she didn't do anything too reckless, she should be just fine.

...Before long, she vanished from sight. Watching her race toward the

enemy, the others cried out, perhaps in confusion, perhaps in anger. Either way, that didn't last long.

"Incoming!" someone shouted, as the trees shook unnaturally and the presence of magic drew near.

Finally, that which had followed them for so long had revealed itself.

"Ma-Mazoku... It's the Mazoku!"

It was unclear who shouted first because this panicked cry seemingly escaped all their mouths at once.

"So you're..."

The Mazoku.

One of the reasons which had brought him to this world.

Chapter 22: Mazoku, Their Power

—Just as everyone was frozen in shock.

From within the forest, several vaguely humanoid figures appeared.

The wings of a bat, the horns of a goat, and a reddish, rust-colored body. These strangely diverse parts nevertheless fit together seamlessly, resulting in a hideous silhouette.

The existence of such a creature was quite the common occurrence in fantasy stories. They were the enemies of the Hero, oddly-formed creatures from the Abyss that thrust the world into chaos.

When comparing aggression, they far surpassed even the magical beasts and monsters whom were also enemies of humanity.

These beings, however, were capable of human speech and possessed highly durable bodies, traits attributed to them in all stories.

However, that aside, they were actually divided into a handful of types and tribes according to the variances between them.

...Our world never had monsters or demons. This is my first time seeing anything like this, Suimei thought to himself as he watched their enemies fly closer.

Although he'd had numerous experiences battling non-human entities

back home, but this was still his first time ever encountering creatures like this, which almost seemed to have leapt straight out of a fantasy painting. Even when compared to the dragons of antiquity described in his own world, they were nothing alike. For that matter, even something like a vampire was quite a bit more human than these things. ...This was, of course, referring to their appearance. If you were to enumerate all the discrepancies, the list would never end.

He would never guessed that in a fantasy world like this one, between demons and subhumans, he would encounter demons first.

—In any event, there was a new problem. Even though they'd now confirmed their enemy's identity to be that of the Mazoku, that answer only raised the new question of what they were doing here.

(From what that minister with the parted hair said, after the Mazoku took the north, they've been relatively quiet...)

This was something he couldn't understand. While the Mazoku might have claimed the northern nation of Noshias for themselves, there should still be at least two countries and a mountain range between their territory and here. For them to appear here of all places was extremely unnatural.

That was, of course, only assuming you were thinking normally. These creatures were not human, and it was perhaps a mistake to try and evaluate their actions through a human viewpoint. It was also entirely possible that they freely moved about as they would, and that any humans they encountered would focus solely on defending their own kingdoms only, never bothering to stop them from advancing.

Man...

If that was really the case, then this was deeply troubling.

Either way, worrying about this now was rather beside the point. Accordingly, Suimei stopped trying to figure out why they were here. His gaze sharpened, and bloodlust filled his eyes as he stared down his enemy.

He focused on a single Mazoku before him, who had seemed to have targeted him as well.

Suddenly, it waved its arm fiercely in his direction.

The Mazoku had seized the initiative.

Was that mana or was that ether?

He saw a circular ball of energy gather in its palm, taking on a fearsome shape before flying in his direction, arrow-like, with a vigorous wave of the Mazoku's arm.

Like hell I'd get hit that easily— Suimei scoffed as he evaded the incoming attack, which whistled through the air.

The attack cratered the ground, casting up a cloud of dust as it hit, but Suimei was entirely unharmed. Though it had been as fast as an arrow,

but to the eyes of a magician, it might as well have been standing still.

Simultaneous with its attack, the Mazoku's wings began to beat furiously as it flew in his direction.

Suimei raced to meet his enemy, who was swooping downward out of the air straight for him.

This threw off his enemy's visual perception.

The Mazoku touched down, only to miss its target. If he had attempted to dodge either backward or to the side, while he'd have thrown off the Mazoku's initial targeted point, it would have been able to fix its flight path mid-course. Since he had instead dashed directly toward it, however, it had been forced to slam on the brakes, and so—

Sha!

Suimei and his enemy's bodies crossed one another. The wind howling as it struck, the Mazoku swung its claws toward Suimei. Perhaps owing to the fact that it hadn't had time to properly adjust its prepared actions, its hasty attack also forced it off-balance.

Exactly what Suimei had been aiming for.

Pivoting off his left foot, he dodged the arc traced by its claws. Grabbing its arm, he took up a karate stance meant for throwing your enemy.

"Haa—"

"—!"

Suimei upped his speed yet further. Under the effects of the increased force, Suimei slammed his foe hard into the ground.

The Mazoku rolled several times. Despite all this, it didn't seem to have been injured. It immediately rose to its feet before taking off into the air once more.

It hovered in the air, its wings flapping as it cautiously maintained a certain distance from Suimei.

Having been taken down from the air once already, it was a bit apprehensive. Even if it hadn't actually really been hurt, it nevertheless hovered in place, its concentrated bloodlust nearly tangible as it spoke in a coarse voice.

"Accursed human, using that kind of strange technique..."

"Calling it 'strange' sure is rude. It just takes a bit of skill is all."

"Hmph..."

Suimei kept his guard up even as he mocked his enemy. The Mazoku snorted contemptuously in response, its tone angry.

However, or rather, what Suimei really wanted to say was—

“So you guys can speak, huh?” he said, straightforwardly saying what was on his mind.

The Mazoku simply snorted once more.

“—Hmph. Pitiful humans. You actually think that the ability to speak is something only you possess?”

“When it comes to human languages anyway.”

Suimei’s answer was delivered without any anxiety whatsoever.

“You really think language is something only humans have? You humans sure are stupid.”

“...‘something only humans have’? Not at all. If it’s your language...”

“Quit your jabbering.”

From its answer, Suimei could tell it had misunderstood and frowned. It looked like conversation would be impossible from here on out. Having spoken its piece, the Mazoku closed its mouth, radiating bloodlust.

“Hmm.”

Faced with this monster pressuring him, Suimei, weary of it all, simply gazed it at indifferently.

Its claws, so disturbingly like the mouthparts of an insect, began to twitch restlessly, giving rise to an instinctual feeling of revulsion. The conversation was over.

...The Mazoku had stopped talking, but that didn't mean it had started to attack either. The attack it had suffered earlier had it on guard, and it watched his every movement, waiting for an opening.

So it's watching me... In that case...

Suimei, too, kept an eye on his opponent as he felt out for the presences around him.

The merchants appeared to have hidden themselves already as they were nowhere to be seen. The others were already engaged in combat with the Mazoku, and from the caravan ahead, he heard the others roaring, surges of magical power, and the dangerous sound of things being smashed.

It seemed the Mazoku had focused on the area where the bodyguards had gathered.

From within the depths of the forest behind him, he could feel far more magical presences than had appeared before the caravan. Lefille must have engaged them already. By holding the majority of their forces

herself, she'd greatly lessened the pressure on the caravan itself and diminished losses greatly. In this sense, her actions had been a most effective countermeasure.

...As he contemplated the situation, Suimei stuck his hand into his pocket, his eyes never leaving the Mazoku across from him. Suddenly, its wings opened wide.

I guess it's about time to act.

"Die..."

"Take this!"

—Snap!

As Suimei's fingers made this sound, the ground under the Mazoku – about to fly straight for him – suddenly exploded.

"Wha—!"

The sound of an explosion filled the air.

But that was just a smokescreen.

The magic invoked by the snap of his fingers obstructed his enemy from continuing forward.

At that moment, Suimei leapt backward to create some distance. Exhaling, he activated another magic.

“...Now then, let’s see just how strong these enemies of this world’s humans are.”

With a low mutter, Suimei gathered the requisite mana.

With a sideways glance, Suimei pictured in his mind the numbers and corresponding equivalence relation of his magic array, and spoke to activate his prepared magic.

—This was the Kabbalah’s most prized technique, the Sefirah.

“—Flamma est lego. Vis wizard...” (By this magician’s will, flame, converge.)

From the scattered magic arrays that appeared in the air, a raging flame burst forth.

The flames soared toward the Mazoku, as if attracted to it.

The Mazoku, however, didn’t move. It allowed itself to be drowned in fire.

Eh?

Seeing that his opponent hadn't bothered to so much as dodge, Suimei was taken aback. Was it that his enemy was stupid or that it had a way to deal with his attack?

As his spell continued to wreath the Mazoku in flame, Suimei pondered what kind of countermeasure his enemy might have prepared.

This was magical fire, a blaze that would never be extinguished until it had disintegrated its target... Or at least, that's what was supposed to happen. Instead, peering into the fire's depths, he saw his enemy's carefree figure, completely unharmed.

At long last, disturbed by some force or another, the flame was blown away.

"...No use, huh?"

The remnants of the inferno fading from its body, the Mazoku, perhaps responding to Suimei's mumbled words, spoke in a stunned tone.

"...You seriously thought you could defeat me with a pitiful magic like that? I've been seriously underestimated here."

"..."

...The magic just now had been too weak, huh. The Mazoku's body showed no signs of having been burned.

Even though his enemy seemed to think that he had been looking down on it, the truth was Suimei really hadn't been all that stingy with either mana or spell technique. Nevertheless, the Mazoku standing before him didn't look to have so much as been singed.

He'd originally thought to decide the battle with a single spell. Indeed, he looked to have severely underestimated his opponent. He'd used a spell in accordance with what he judged the enemy's ability to resist to be based on the amount of mana he sensed within its body. The effected result, however, had been entirely outside of his expectations.

Once more, the Mazoku extended an arm, gathering power.

This time, however, it didn't bother with arm motions. The lump of power shot forward on its own.

His foe seemed intent on a long-range battle. Suimei casually dodged with room to spare. Power gathered once more on the Mazoku's hand.

Thereafter, as though a solo marksman, arrows of energy flew at Suimei one after another.

Suimei raced around, evading each attack, taking care never to get too close to the wagon carrying the caravan's cargo.

Trying to suppress me with sheer numbers, is it...?

As Suimei ran, he observed his foe's facial expression, which began to grow ever more anxious.

Any normal person would already have been done in. It seemed he was more of a troublesome foe than the Mazoku had expected.

Anyway, if his opponent wanted a long-range battle, then that was rather advantageous for Suimei as well. Trading blows from a certain distance was an ideal situation for a magician.

Hounded by transparent arrows of energy, Suimei constructed another magic.

—Since last time's magic had failed, he would use an even more powerful offensive spell.

“—*Flamma est lego. Vis wizard hex agon aestua sursum!*” (By this magician's will, flame, converge. Raging flame, give form to its death throes!)

The scene from earlier repeated itself as numerous magic circles appeared once more. This time, however, they weren't solely to be found in the air, but were rather also on the ground, and all over their surroundings. Moreover, there were at least fifty percent more appearing than had previously. Their destructive might was also incomparably greater.

Fire poured forth once more, both raining down from the sky and surging up from the ground, swallowing the arrows of energy whole as it

screamed toward its target.

"Sh..."

The fire this time unsettled the Mazoku. It started to dodge, but it was too late. Its delayed movements were meaningless in the face of the approaching flames.

The brilliant flames seized upon their target.

However.

"...How weak! These flames!"

"...!"

Fiery lines drew a whirlpool of flame encircling about the Mazoku, caught in the eye of the storm. Noticing that the flames were again unable to cause it harm, it ceased its attempts to evade, instead opening its mouth to speak.

Ignoring the searing flames, it waved its arm in Suimei's direction.

"I've had it with you!"

An enormous mass of power came flying his way, consuming the remnants of Suimei's spell and turning the trees behind Suimei to dust as

it approached.

Nevertheless, an attack of that level was something that Suimei could avoid with ease. He took a firm leap backward.

In the next instant, a cloud of dust, thrown up by the attack, crashed into his person.

Suimei held up a hand to protect his face as his mind raced.

Even that attack didn't do anything...

The enemy before him, a Mazoku.

What was it about it that rendered his magic so ineffective?

Looking it over, he couldn't find anything that would grant it such a resistance. That his magic would be utterly impotent was hard to believe.

...Its mana levels aren't anywhere near enough to resist the magic I've been using, but it doesn't look like it's an innate, physical resistance either...

His enemy definitely did not have the ability to weaken his magic enough to extinguish it, nor should the Mazoku be in possession of a body with a magical resistance of such a degree either. Even if its body was extremely durable, but from the sensation he'd felt when he'd sent it crashing into the ground, it wasn't at a level that surpassed other

lifeforms.

It was conceivable that it had innate resistance to fire, but for it to be to the extent that it hadn't been so much as singed by his flames was not.

If he were to assume that it was not a resistance to fire, but rather the ability to extinguish its flames, then several possibilities existed.

That was because fire created by magic was quite different from the naturally occurring phenomenon.

The flames called forth by magic were unlike the naturally occurring phenomenon, which would only occur when the conditions of a fuel source and sufficient oxygen were met. Instead, it operated via the medium of a reconstructed mystery, essentially forcibly inducing the combustion phenomenon. Aside from ignition conditions, magical fire would simply burn along the path outlined by the spell.

Subsequently, unless you countered the magic process directly, the flame would never go out until its target had been completely consumed.

Of course, if it was a simple spell on the level of a firestarter, then that was a different matter, but it should go without saying that the type of magic Suimei had just invoked was of the other type.

So why was it that the fire brought about by his magic wasn't working?

...He was thoroughly confused by this matter, but he nevertheless focused on his surroundings for the time being.

Battle was still ongoing all over, but there were no signs of having lost any ground to the Mazoku. This was because the attacking Mazoku were far outnumbered by those guarding the caravan.

The other escorts don't seem to be having any problems. In that case, let's try this...

Then, in that case...

Shik!

Suimei evaded the slash of his enemy's claws. Continuously he dodged as the Mazoku continued to chain its strikes.

"In that case, there's another reason why it's not working—"

"You just don't shut up, do you..."

"—Your clinginess is really getting on my nerves!"

"Hah!"

Suimei roared as he snapped his fingers.

Even though the Mazoku was subjected to his attack from close range, it was essentially unharmed. Nevertheless, he'd accomplished his goal of

sending it flying.

"...You brat. Using the same magic over and over like an idiot!"

"Sorry. I don't have that many magics on hand, after all."

"Uaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa—!"

The Mazoku snarled, its figure growing hazy. Reacting purely on instinct, Suimei threw out an arm.

"Primum excipio!" (First bulwark, local activation!)

To prevent the charge of the Mazoku, accelerating nonstop toward him, Suimei activated this physical defensive magic.

As if the magic array had been granted a power of some kind, at the moment of contact, a shrill noise accompanied flying sparks.

"W-what—?!"

A thoroughly shocked expression appeared on the face of the Mazoku, seeing this defensive spell for the first time. Suimei took the opportunity to consider the strange feeling of disharmony that filled him.

...What in the world? My magic was clearly ineffective earlier, and yet the golden fortress completely stopped its attack?

If his opponent had an ability that would directly affect magic itself, then his defensive magic should have been disrupted just now. Even if it wasn't able to completely shatter his defense in an instant, the subsequent shock should have broken through.

However, that had most definitely not happened. Its attack had been rendered entirely impotent. Consequently, an endless tide of questions streamed through Suimei's mind.

"W-what just happened?! How could I be stopped by that thing?!"

"Ha, isn't it obvious?!"

"Impertinent brat—"

—The Mazoku, coming to the realization that attacking wasn't working, and concerned about a counterattack, placed some distance between them.

As Suimei frowned, the sound of an explosion came from not far off. Keeping the Mazoku in his peripheral vision, he turned in the direction the sound had come from. There, a caravan escort had destroyed another Mazoku with an explosive magic.

A fire magic.

And yet, unlike when he had done so, the Mazoku was scorched by the

flames, and drew its last breath.

"That guy..."

What the heck?

Even though his magical flames had been entirely ineffective, it was nevertheless now evident that the Mazoku did not possess any sort of exceptional, innate resistance to flame.

Suddenly, as Suimei was evaluating the situation, a male voice suddenly called out.

"Hey! What are you doing?! Get back!"

"Hmm?"

"You! The guy with the black hair! Pull back!"

Enemy defeated, he'd noticed Suimei's situation.

The other adventurers, their Mazoku eliminated, rushed over.

Looking more closely, he recognized them as the party that Lefille had happily conversed with.

As directed by the warrior adventurer, a girl – the party's mage –

chanted as fire sprang forth from the end of her staff.

Perhaps having noticed, the Mazoku suddenly flew backward with a flap of its wings.

So that magic is one to be avoided...

Sensing the danger, it pulled back. Although it had previously tried to avoid one of his spells, but this time it really retreated a good distance, perhaps owing to the difference between his magic and hers when it came to effectiveness was against the Mazoku.

Next.

The adventurer who had raced to his side spoke.

"Get back. We'll take care of things."

"No, it's okay. I can do it."

"What do you mean you 'can do it'...?! You were clearly in a desperate situation!"

"Desperate? No, not at all..."

"What else would you call it?! That Mazoku is as healthy as can be!"

Well, on the surface of things, that was undeniable. But that just meant it'd take a little more time is all. That Mazoku posed no threat to him whatsoever, not to mention he hadn't yet used his true strength.

All the same, since he'd been unable to bring his foe down, from an outsider's point of view, he was indeed locked in a desperate battle.

"...Maybe, but either way, I still want to continue."

"No way. Retreat back to the caravan, we'll take care of this."

"Eh? No, no, that's a problem!" Suimei rejected the adventurer's words with a shake of his head.

Indeed, it would be troubling for Suimei. If he were to simply leave this in someone else's hands, then he'd never be able to unravel the enigma of why his magic was so ineffective against the Mazoku. He would leave without knowing precisely just how much power it took to take down his enemy. Considering that he wasn't in any danger, he couldn't just allow the mystery to remain unsolved.

And yet.

"Huh? What problem are you talking about? Once we take that thing down, there won't be any problems left, right? Now then, hurry back to the caravan—?!"

Not entirely paying attention as he spoke, the adventurer's words suddenly stopped short.

That was due to having to avoid something that flew his way – the Mazoku’s attack.

The adventurer at Suimei’s side didn’t seem to have thoroughly grasped the attack, as he unnecessarily leapt a great distance away.

Realizing that its attack had been avoided sight unseen, the Mazoku circled around horizontally, as if gliding, while drawing close.

It attempted to flank them in order to attack from a blind spot.

“Shit, it’s already here!”

Gripping his sword, the adventurer advanced a step, seemingly intending to protect Suimei, something that he should feel grateful for.

However, both feelings of gratitude and nervousness vanished before Suimei’s next incantation.

“—Astrum micans profundum. Cupio csuspento is ut vomica!” (—Sea of stars, transform the Blessed Mother’s words into a curse!) [TN: The author completely butchered the Latin on this one. I mean, they usually only barely make sense, but this time, he included both a term that doesn’t exist – “csuspento” – as well as one that makes no sense in the context it’s used in – “vomica”. If anyone knows how to fix this incantation, I’d very much appreciate some suggestions.]

Below Suimei, a magic circle the color of dayflowers appeared. In order to quicken the construction of the magic, within the palm of his right hand, he constructed a “refined spell archetype”.

“Ha! Have you still not realized that your magic is useless?!”

He definitely understood. However, magicians were the kind of being that would endlessly pursue every hypothesis until each and every one had been disproven. As long as possibilities still continued to exist, they would never give up.

“—Stella maris!” (Go! Cursed, frozen star!)

—Cursed Stella Maris.

As he released the magic sphere in his hand, several bluish magic arrays manifested before him, the refined magic releasing its power.

Acceleration, acceleration, amplification, and then refinement.

Hail with a vapor trail. Comet-like bullets of magic. Taking into the air, these frozen stars plummeted toward the Mazoku.

“Ice?! —Wha?! ”

The Mazoku raised its altitude and escaped backward.

As the magic comets impacted the ground, massive icicles surged upward like blooming flowers. The icy moisture created by the icicles instantly froze the Mazoku's torso, even in the air as it was.

"...Tch. Its a lot weaker. I guess that's the best I can hope for without either Spica or Sirius in the sky..."

It was the same as when he'd enacted his Meteor magic. As expected, magic that relied on the constellations was difficult to wield in this other world, seeing as neither they nor the stars of his world appeared in these skies.

Unable to draw on the power of the stars, the magic's might had weakened considerably.

"Hehe, you're too naive, human! If you think ice is going to— W-wha?!"

"Heh. Sorry to disappoint, but this is a different type of magic from the ones I used before. I don't think you'll find it that easy to break free."

"Something of this level – shit! Why can't I break this brittle ice?!"

Trying to escape its prison, the Mazoku pounded on the icicle with great strength, though it didn't so much as shudder.

—Cursed ice.

A frozen phenomenon recreated by the Sefirah of the Kabbalah.

Astrology had been used to further strengthen its effect, and a curse had been interspersed throughout. An icy magic of the water element, the product of three separate magic systems interwoven with one another.

In addition to the frozen shards it created, it would also follow the trails left by the moisture it summoned, imprisoning its target in an mysterious, frozen barrier.

Adding in the fact that it also carried a curse, this was a most vicious magic. With the added effect of the curse, simply breaking the ice itself was insufficient to escape its grasp. Yes, this was cursed ice. As long as you did not destroy the curse itself, the ice would never melt, nor would it ever shatter.

Finally, something worked... Suimei thought to himself as he watched his enemy.

Actually, it would have been far stranger for it to not have worked. Despite the fact that he was extremely surprised to see that the Mazoku had not itself been frozen, he had nevertheless expected as much when he had enacted this spell.

Even if the Mazoku possessed some sort of abnormal magic immunity, even if the power of his spell, unable to resonate with the stars, had weakened, this was still a two-layered ice magic. Escaping this frozen prison would prove unnaturally arduous.

...The adventurer suddenly patted Suimei on the shoulder.

"What's this? So you can use two elements! That's pretty impressive!"

"Well, something of this level..."

"Don't be modest. I'm really seeing you in a new light here!"

"Eh, no..."

That really wasn't anything special. Suimei was left in a strange mood. The adventurer called out to his companions—

"Alright! Let's do it now! It can't move, so let's give it all we've got!"

Suddenly.

"—□□□□□!"

The Mazoku roared at the heavens.

The howl of a cornered beast.

A piercing cry. Just like that, the Mazoku gave voice to its hatred, the sound ringing in the ears of all those around.

At the same time, its mana levels started to soar, it having seemingly drawn on every last one of its hidden reserves. This caused a dark, dense, foul cloud of power to gather around its body.

What? Mana? N-no, this is—

While Suimei tried to put his finger on the familiar air of dark energy that had begun to overflow, the adventurer called out loudly.

"C-crap! The ice is going to break!"

"Hmm?"

Suimei interrupted his train of thought and turned to the adventurer. The adventurer seemed afraid of the power the Mazoku was now displaying. The joyous expression formerly adorning his face had turned anxious once again.

Suimei, on the other hand, was as calm as ever.

"Why?"

"What do you mean 'why'? That's the power of a Mazoku when it's serious, you know?! It's going to break that ice with ease!"

"Well, no, that's not going to happen. It doesn't matter how much struggles, it's not going to be able to break those icicles," Suimei replied calmly.

"Not going to break you say? What kind of leisurely things are you saying?! Look!"

" 'Look'...?"

His gaze followed the direction the adventurer's finger pointed in.

There was the Mazoku, the same as before. What was, however, drastically different were the deep cracks running through the cursed ice binding it.

"Huh...? Wait, oi oi oi! You've gotta be kidding me?! That's a curse! A hex! How can it possibly break like that?!"

"Why are you only surprised now?"

"Nonononono, how could anyone remain calm after seeing that?!"

Suimei was practically screaming, the scene unveiling itself before his eyes had so blown away any notion of common sense. He continued to watch.

What the hell is going on? The cursed ice is really breaking... This is insane.

—The type of magic known as hexes weren't simply curses. Hexes were a specific technique belonging to the curse system of modern magic. Briefly described, they did not use feelings of resentment as a foundation, but were rather entirely artificial, manufactured from beginning to end.

Different from the terrifying destructive power or powerful bindings that were born of deep feelings of resentment, hexes were able to directly reproduce the effects of these spells without the underlying requirement of these negative feelings. Dispelling a hex required directly targeting the technique itself, which required a thorough understanding of such things in addition to a fair amount of skill.

Anyway, that was why what was happening now was simply unbelievable. A curse originally wasn't something that manifested physically the way other magic did. For it to be destroyed in this manner was like a certain famous monk who'd subdued a painting of a tiger.

"S-shit! Everyone, take him down, NOW!" the adventurer beside Suimei shouted, as Suimei frowned worriedly.

Sounds of acknowledgment echoed from all around.

The other adventurers traded glances and nodded before proceeding to take action. Unfortunately, the torrent of black energy pouring forth from the Mazoku sent them all flying.

"D-dammit! Don't get too close!"

"Use magic! Kill it with magic!"

"—O flame! Become a spear and pierce my foe!"

As commanded, the magicians began to chant.

It wasn't well thought out, though. Judging by what had happened earlier, if it was just the Mazoku they were dealing with, then perhaps their magic would have been sufficient to break through its defenses. This time, however, the Mazoku was surrounded by ice.

There had never been a reason to revoke a curse in their own world, and so Suimei lacked the ability to cancel the curse and break the surrounding ice.

Consequently, the magic intended to destroy the Mazoku weakened considerably.

As their respective magics landed, what appeared before them was the sight of the Mazoku, completely unharmed.

"What's going on? How come our magic didn't work...?!"

The adventurers were deeply shaken.

At this moment, the Mazoku's power continued to surge forth as before. This tremendous power filled them with a fear they could not ignore.

This was a strange power, utterly unlike the feeling that came from a magician activating their mana furnace.

That power... I've seen it somewhere before...

But no.

...It's about time for me to get serious. My hex isn't going to last long before that power.

Suimei was concerned by the Mazoku's power. Even though that strange power bothered him, he didn't have the luxury of thinking about it now.

Indeed, the cracks running through the icicle were already steadily growing larger. Paying the price for this action, blood dripped from all over its body, its veins bursting due to the exertion. Nevertheless, if things were to continue down this path, it would break through its prison before it died, after which it would come straight for him.

He needed to destroy it before that could happen.

"—*Flamme est lego. Vis wizard...*" (By this magician's will, flame, converge.)

"That spell again?! It hasn't worked from the very beginning!"

"—Really? Although it's the same spell as before, but I'm using all my power this time; you can't just say it'll turn out the same!"

"You really think you're going to burn me with a piddling warmth of this degree?!"

"You sure are full of yourself, aren't you, you phony demon! Don't you dare look down on a magician's flames!" Suimei yelled before beginning his next incantation.

"Hex agon aestua sursum. Impedimuntum mors!" (Raging flame, give form to its death throes! Grant death unto the one obstructing my path!)

Fire gathered. This time, however, it did not form itself into whips of flame lashing toward the Mazoku. Instead it became a whirling eddy of flame swirling around its target.

Everything caught in its path was turned to ash in an instant.

"—W-what? It's different from last time..."

The fire's light reflected off the ice, filling the backdrop of forest and sky with a blinding scarlet light.

At some point, a small magic circle had encircled a magic stone in Suimei's palm, which burned with a deep orange flame.

—Speaking aloud the final activation keyword, Suimei crushed the magic stone.

"—Fiamma o Ashurbanipal!" (Burn like the sun, gem of Ashurbanipal!)

In an instant, the flames surrounding the Mazoku suddenly closed in, their terrifying might drowning out all sound.

The scene was suddenly rocked by an explosion as fire fountained out of the ground and the heavens were dyed a reddish-white. An explosive roar accompanied this dramatic display.

A conflagration.

Crimson waves of heat billowed outward, spreading in all directions.

Subjected to this terrifying explosive power, the Mazoku didn't even have time to scream its last.

None of those watching had the luxury of noting this, however, as they were too busy protecting themselves. Defending themselves against the terrifying heat shooting forth was already taking their all.

...In the end, all that remained was the smell of burnt trees and a few flickering embers.

Even though he'd carefully adjusted the strength of his spell out of concern for their surroundings, a flame of this scale and the resulting shockwave had reduced the ground the Mazoku had been standing on to lava.

"W-what an amazing magic!" an adventurer called out, stunned.

The voice belonged to the young magician girl. Her words broke the others out of their stupor, after which they mirrored her sentiment.

"O-oi! Even the clouds have been turned black...!"

"Mid-level magic? B-but this destructive power..."

"Lava...? Isn't this the stuff that comes out of volcanoes...?"

In this world, black smoke and lava weren't that commonly seen. As those around continued to voice their shock, the first adventurer approached Suimei.

"Hey, you! Looks like you can really do it if you try! If you can do something like this, then you should just do it from the start!"

"Y, yeah. It's my first time fighting the Mazoku, so I'm still getting used to things."

"Really? Is that why you were so stingy with your magic? Next time, just go ahead and wreck the things!"

"Haa..."

That ran completely counter to what Suimei intended, though.

Suimei gave a vague reply to the smiling adventurer, resulting in a surprised question.

"What's up? Wasn't that the first Mazoku you've ever defeated? Shouldn't you be happier?"

"Hmm?"

"What's with that response? You should be more excited! Don't tell me you're tired already!"

"No, I'm fine..."

"Is that so? Well, alright then... Do take care of yourself, okay?"

"W-will do..."

"Good. It's goodbye then."

The warrior adventurer seemed to have misunderstood something, convinced that he was a novice to battle. He cast Suimei one last look before rejoining his companions.

Sending him off with his eyes, Suimei sighed tiredly.

"...Whatever. Forget it."

Left in a state where he didn't know what to say, Suimei nevertheless didn't really mind.

Somewhat dejectedly he scratched his head, before pulling himself together and turning in the direction the Mazoku had come from.

So this is a Mazoku, huh...

This was the subordinate of the one he'd been called to this world to face.

He'd originally intended to take the opportunity to properly gauge his enemy's strength, but in the end, he'd been forced to crush it with raw power.

To be honest, it'd hadn't been difficult in the least.

While it had indeed taken him some time, but that was all. In fact, before Suimei had even had a chance to reveal his true strength, his enemy had already been turned to dust.

However—

"...Even though I used the flames of Ashurbanipal, it still took about a minute for it to die..."

He'd destroyed the Mazoku with a fire magic. Of the five great elements, this was the element that he was most proficient in. He was naturally suited to these magics, the destructive power of these spells could be easily seen, and their incantations were relatively shorter when compared to other magics.

And yet, destroying the enemy with a spell of this nature had still taken a whole minute.

That was far too time-consuming. The vast majority of things lasted but mere moments in the face of such flames. The Mazoku, however, were clearly the exception. Even a small fry like that one had proven this difficult.

Suimei's face was stiff, his consternation visible.

Suddenly, something came whistling toward him from behind.

"What—?!"

Suimei turned a moment later. What he saw was the figure of something just like what he had just seen.

A Mazoku that had been sent flying.

—More accurately, pieces of a Mazoku.

Two pieces. Three. A twisted arm, a broken leg, and a severed head flew in his direction.

What the—

Suimei stared dumbly.

Dropping to the floor around him were scattered parts of a Mazoku's body. Following soon after was the figure of Lefille, holding her enormous sword with a single hand.

From the shade of the trees, the girl held her silver and scarlet blade aloft. The girl currently before him bore no hint of the gentle atmosphere that had accompanied her at their first meeting.

Leaning forward slightly, her eyes glittered with vermilion light. The arm holding her weapon was taut as a bowstring, her form that of a fierce god.

A strangely audible gulp resounded through the area.

The sound became a signal. Sent flying along with the pile of parts that had been its companion, the surviving Mazoku rushed toward Lefille.

An ambush. It'd intentionally targeted the moment when Lefille had stopped, thinking it likely the moment that she would reveal an opening.

This "ambush" of its, however, had simply been wishful thinking.

Lefille hadn't lowered her guard. Although she'd sent her enemy flying, she was as cautious as though it were still immediately before her.

Accordingly, she'd never left a combat-ready state.

In the face of that overpowering will, the Mazoku, struggling to the last, had no chance of victory.

Dashing toward her, Lefille slashed horizontally with her giant weapon.

She had not shown a single opening during that attack, from start to finish. The enormous blade seemingly causing a storm of wind to gust as it cut through the air.

Struck by this weapon, the Mazoku was cleanly split in two.

Immediately following, Lefille sliced again, this time vertically, from high to low. Her attack was like a whirlwind, and her twin strikes drew a cross in the air, this time parting the Mazoku's body along its vertical axis.

And so the Mazoku met its end.

The girl's movements, however, had not concluded.

Her actions now were superfluous. There was no meaning in continuing to slash a foe that had already perished.

Completely unconcerned by the fact that what she was doing now was quite literally overkill, she punctuated her kill by crushing the Mazoku's head with her sword, as if to say that she hadn't yet had her fill.

"Be crushed... devil!"

Her half-mumbled words passed through Suimei's ears, words of loathing seemingly directed at an enemy not currently present.

...The indescribable oppressive atmosphere smothering the area suddenly disappeared. Lefille lifted her sword, and walked over to rejoin the others.

"...It looks like things are done on your guys' end."

"Y-yeah. You could say that..."

The one to answer had been the adventurer from just earlier, the one from the party that was familiar with Lefille. Despite the fact that Lefille had returned to her normal self, unable to wipe the shocking memory of the ferocious vision he had just seen from his mind, his answer was delivered rather stiffly.

Suimei, acting on behalf of both himself and the adventurer, raised a question.

"And your end?"

"Ah, yeah, it's been cleaned to the point that not a one is left. There are no more Mazoku in that section of the forest."

Just as she'd declared to the crowd before racing off, she'd destroyed them utterly. That was Lefille for you.

Although Suimei...

"Weren't there more Mazoku in the forest than came out?"

"Yes. My original plan heading over was to completely clear them all out."

"Hah..."

Suimei wasn't sure what to say. Lefille revealed a fearless smile.

"You guys didn't have any problems, I trust?"

"Nope."

His answer had been direct, and to be fair, there truly hadn't been any difficulties.

On that note, Lefille really planned on killing them all herself...

"I let some escape. I sure need more training," she added regretfully.

Just what in the world is this girl...

Lefille slowly looked around.

"Just earlier, I had a really shocking sound from over here. Was that perhaps the cause of this scene of carnage?"

"Yep. That was a spell of mine."

At his answer, she suddenly showed a look of surprise, though a bright expression appeared once more on her face immediately thereafter.

"As expected from you, Suimei-kun. How lively."

"What's that supposed to mean? It took this much just to take down one of them."

"Wait, what? Just one?"

"Yeah."

Her confusion was likely due to the devastation that had been caused to their surroundings. Suimei nodded, prompting another stunned question from Lefille.

"...I'd planned on holding up any strong ones, but I guess one made it here?"

"No, I'm pretty sure it was the same as the others. It looked just like the one you just chopped into pieces," Suimei answered, casting a quick glance in the direction of the fallen Mazoku.

All the Mazoku that had attacked this area looked to be of the same type, as all bore the same resemblance to the devils of lore.

When it came to individual differences between them, however, that was another story. Either way, Suimei had never felt the slightest hint of danger from start to finish, and thus decided there hadn't been any particularly strong individuals among their number.

"I don't think so. Anything that would have taken this much to bring down shouldn't just be any normal Mazoku... This is at least an intermediate level magic, if I'm not mistaken...?"

"Intermediate level?"

"Yeah. Is it not?" she asked.

...What's qualifies as an intermediate level magic?

On that note, the magic of this world wasn't split into the five main elements but rather eight, the distinction of which was rather unclear.

Magic was further divided into low level, intermediate level, and high level spells. When Reiji and Mizuki had learned high level spells, their escorts had been overjoyed. That memory was still vivid in his mind.

So just how are they defined?

When it came to magic, his world and this one differed wildly on both standards and specifications, and so this wasn't a question Suimei was able to answer.

"...Sorry. I know it's not the answer you're looking for, but I don't know what else to say. To be honest, I'm not really sure."

Although Suimei's answer was apologetic, Lefille nevertheless didn't seem to be able to simply accept it.

"You're not sure? Why not? You mentioned before that your father taught you magic... Did he perhaps never mention these things?"

"Oh, that. No, it's because this is a magic I created myself."

"WHAT—?! You created that yourself?!"

"Eh? What? Something strange about that?"

Suimei cocked his head, puzzled by the flabbergasted reaction of the young woman.

Generally speaking, aside from a few basics and standard, well-known spells, his repertoire was entirely self-invented. While the constellations of astrology and their meanings were already established, thus resulting in a field that would not evolve, both magicians who practiced either the Kabbalah or hexes – very free-form magic systems – as well as high-ranked magicians frequently created magic of their own that capitalized on their specialties to achieve optimal efficiency.

"B-but... Is something like that really possible...?"

"Of course it is. As long as you have both time and knowledge, in addition to the ability to think outside the box, then it's very much possible. To be more accurate, I should say crafting personal magics is a necessity, really."

"I, I see. It sure sounds hard... being a mage."

He wasn't sure where, but Lefille seemed to have misunderstood something, as she incessantly mumbled to herself. The mage girl, standing to the side, timidly raised her hand.

"A-about that magic. From what I saw, it didn't look any weaker than anything another mage would use, but... Well, it didn't seem that effective on the Mazoku."

"...Really?"

"Absolutely. Just where did my magic go wrong, I wonder."

When it came to this topic, Suimei could only shrug helplessly.

Seriously, what's going on here...

Though the topic came to an end without reaching a meaningful conclusion, Suimei nevertheless had a clue to follow.

In its last moments, that power that the Mazoku had shown. Suimei was certain he'd seen it somewhere.

That was a power that gave him goosebumps, a corrupt force that was somehow physiologically disagreeable.

Was that perhaps that power that the Mazoku worshiped—?

"...That reminds me. I heard before that the Mazoku worship some kind of evil god...?"

Perhaps that was it.

—Just as Suimei was looking to unravel this mystery.

Lefille suddenly called out.

"...Suimei-kun. Everyone."

"Hmm? What's up?"

"It looks like things aren't over just yet."

Everyone turned.

Lefille tipped her head, pointing in the direction of the caravan. The others followed her gaze. There, the presences of more Mazoku could be felt.

"No way..."

Suimei's words echoed the sentiments of all watching.

This battle wasn't over yet.

Chapter 23: The Spirit'S Sword

"It looks like things aren't over just yet."

Her gaze sharp, Lefille's comment filled the others with anxiety.

The magician girl's gaze followed the direction that Lefille had pointed in.

"L-Lefille-san is right. They're coming this way! And there's more than last time..."

"Are you serious?"

"Damn! There were people hurt in the battle just now. We don't have enough people!"

The young girl's words sent the bodyguards and adventurers into a frantic clamor.

The reality of the continuation of their battle with the Mazoku was evidenced by the presence of additional presences. Moreover, not only had some of their number been injured in the previous battle, but there were even more Mazoku than the last time. Things had taken a turn for the worse.

Given the above, that they felt shaken to their cores was only natural.

A step later, Suimei began to focus on reconnaissance. Closing his eyes in order to shut out unnecessary information, he activated his magician's sixth sense.

There's what, ten? No, about twenty. Just like they said, there's more than last time.

Just like the previous time, the presences were headed straight for them.

The strength of the presences felt roughly on par with those from the previous battle. These were likely the same kind of Mazoku—

As Suimei was staring off into the distance, the bodyguards lamented their situation bewilderedly.

"...What do we do now?"

"Do you even have to ask? We meet their attack! There's nowhere to run, after all!"

"Listen up! Everyone hurt in the last battle, pull back! Everyone else, prepare yourself!"

Roared commands overlapped, serving only to further deepen the already disorganized atmosphere. Very soon their enemies would arrive.

They'd won fairly handily the first time around, but that was only because they far outnumbered the enemy. Now that their numbers had lessened while their enemies' had grown, fear had them in its grip. Terror and unrest had seized a hold of this battlefield.

Galeo, who had hidden in the cargo wagon along with the other merchants until now, stepped out.

He walked into the midst of the bodyguards, who were busy with preparations.

"I-is the battle not over yet...?" Galeo asked in a shrill voice, his face ashen.

As a noncombatant, as far as he was concerned, the Mazoku were solely an object of fear. From the actions and words of the others, he seemed to have noticed the situation.

One of the escorts answered him.

"Yes. Please continue to wait, it seems there are more Mazoku headed this way."

"W-what? Are we going to be okay?!"

"...That, huh. Well, from what was said, it seems there are more than last time and we don't have the time to heal those who were wounded. Things might not go so well for us this time."

"How could this happen... Are you telling me we're going to die?!"

"No, we'll protect you with all we've got. It's just that..."

"What?"

"In a worst case scenario, our defense will collapse and some of the guards might flee."

"—!? ...I-I see. How did it come to this..."

"If it comes to down to it, before our defense collapses completely, please take the other merchants and escape."

His voice low and soft, his expression serious, and his face grave, the adventurer informed Galeo of the possibility that some of the guards might run. As he'd said, one's life was something irreplaceable.

Here solely for the money, there was definitely the possibility that some would run, prioritizing their personal safety.

If such a thing were indeed to occur, it was best to make plans for their own escape, the adventurer seemed to be saying.

Despairing, a strained look appeared on Galeo's face. He'd originally thought that this was going to be a smooth trip, that they'd reach the empire without any difficulty. However, just before the finish line,

something like this had happened.

Not only had the Mazoku suddenly appeared, but now they were attacking in an endless stream. Why they had gone to such an effort to target a small caravan and a few escorts was incomprehensible.

Thoughts raced through his mind.

As Galeo groaned in frustration, Lefille – the first to notice that a second round of battle was about to begin – walked over.

Her confident posture seemed ever so reliable.

“—Please don’t worry, Galeo-dono. I won’t leave a single one of the incoming Mazoku alive.”

He raised his head.

“I-it’s Gurakis-dono... Although your words certainly seem very confident, but against the Mazoku, a young girl like yourself..”

“It can’t be easy as you make it out to be,” he seemed to want to say, but he avoided being so direct.

From his eyes it was easy to see that in her he saw only a frail young girl, leaving him both puzzled and disbelieving.

He had not witnessed her earlier might nor was he aware of her efforts in the forest.

In light of that, he couldn't really be blamed for his skepticism...

The adventurer who had previously spoken to Suimei took the opportunity to step forward and speak with great confidence.

"No, it's not like that at all! Lefille is strong, you know! The Mazoku from the battle just now were pretty much killed by her alone!"

"Yeah! And Lefille-san even has the skill to kill a half-giant with one strike! That's why you don't need to worry yourself too much over these Mazoku," the magician girl said, supplementing the warrior adventurer's words.

Compared to the other adventurers, this pair was far more collected, likely owing to their experience fighting by Lefille's side in the past. Their words caused Galeo to stare at them and Lefille with surprise, as they were able to keep their calm in such terrifying circumstances.

"Is that really true...?"

"Absolutely. So don't worry."

Though it wasn't that loud, Lefille's assertion was nevertheless filled with confidence. Perhaps because he hadn't felt the slightest hint of weakness in her words, Galeo finally calmed down.

When it came to this young girl, who had nearly singlehandedly defeated all the Mazoku in the battle just earlier, perhaps the Mazoku might as well have been nothing more than ants.

On that note—

"...You sure are trusted."

The battle scene from earlier having left a deep impression on them, the warrior and magician girl watched Lefille with admiring eyes.

These words came from Suimei, who, sighing, was reacting to their worshipful expressions.

"...P-please don't say that, Suimei-kun. I was pretty nervous myself, you know. It isn't like how it sounds," Lefille countered, embarrassed.

"You might say that, but there was quite the expression on your face at the time, you know?"

"...O-oh."

Suimei's continued attack deepened her feelings of embarrassment. Her face reddened, making for an unbearably cute impression.

Having listened to the pair's advice, Galeo turned to Lefille.

His gaze still half-disbelieving, he coughed, and doing his best to control his feelings, spoke.

"...I understand. I look forward to seeing what you can do."

"Sure. I'll do my best to live up to your expectations," Lefille said, meeting his business-like manner with modesty.

Their conversation over, Lefille turned to Suimei.

"Suimei-kun."

"Hmm? What's up?"

What's this all of a sudden?

Her voice serious as she called out to him, Suimei turned to face Lefille.

"I apologize if I'm being a bit annoying here, but are you okay? If anything happened in that last battle, please don't force yourself. It'd be best if you pulled back with the others," she said solemnly.

She's bringing this up because my magic wasn't working on the Mazoku, huh.

Indeed, from the perspective of a magician, it was best to avoid

troublesome battles. Perhaps it would be best to leave this to the others. That was what the others seemed to be suggesting as well, after all.

However, there were too many enemies. In a situation like this where their safety couldn't be guaranteed, he wouldn't stand by and do nothing.

"No, it's fine."

"Are you sure?"

Just as Lefille asked this, the male adventurer echoed her question.

"Yeah, are you sure you're okay? You used quite a few magics back there. Are you not tired?"

"Oh, no. I'm fine. Room to spare, really."

" 'Room to spare', is it? ...Being overly confident in your abilities is a mistake with consequences that you can't take back later, you know?"

"I appreciate the warning."

Suimei's response was cold, but polite. Their words had been said out of concern for his welfare, after all, so he wouldn't directly contradict them.

He nodded his head to indicate a superficial agreement, but the

adventurer met him with a doubting gaze, not entirely believing.

Lefille spoke up once more.

"But Suimei-kun, are you really okay considering that your magic doesn't seem that effective on the Mazoku?"

"Oh, that. I'll think of something."

"Do you think you can do it?"

"My magic isn't limited to what I showed just now. If a particular magic system doesn't work, then I'll just have to make inferences from what I observe and continually try things until I find something that works," he answered, explaining the reasoning behind his confidence.

Lefille frowned, as if something he'd said was foreign to her.

"...? A 'system' that works? Not an element?"

"Oh, I see, um, how do I put this... It's complicated."

Her confused look clearly embedded itself in his vision. His answer was nevertheless rather evasive.

While the magic he had used previously had definitely demonstrated less-than-ideal results, it was nowhere near life-threatening.

Back in his world, "systems" were how they classified the various types of magic.

This was evidence that magic in their world did not arise from a single origin.

Although their world was one in which science had spread throughout society, leaving magic but a thing of myth and legend, even in such a world, there were countless examples of this mysterious thing.

In addition to astrology, the Kabbalah, and hexes, there was also witchcraft; the ever-famous alchemy; onmyoudou, a composite of various magics; Vajrayana Buddhism and its numerous sects; as well as the largest system of Far Eastern magic, senjutsu.

Just the types that were known and classified already surpassed thirty in number.

If these were further subdivided by element, sequence, effect, etc., it would result in a staggering number of types.

Simply put, the world he was from was home to a diverse array of mysteries.

Even if you were to exclude magic systems that he was incapable of using, as well as those that he had learned but that he had not yet fulfilled the requirements for using, he would definitely be able to find something effective among those that remained.

Exorcism or holy magic, for example.

Either way, the fact that his magic was less effective than normal did not mean that it was in any way inferior to the magic of this world. Even if he failed to find a system that worked even after repeated tries, then he could simply crush his enemy with raw power as he had done earlier.

—Whether ten Mazoku or twenty, as long as he matched their number with spells of his own, there would be no problem.

If there was anything at all that he was concerned about, then it was that he might have to reveal what he was truly capable of in order to deal with the enemy.

If it did come to that, however, his preference to keep things secret would have to fall second to the safety of the group.

Although it's a last resort, but if worst comes to worst, I'm going to have to activate my mana furnace.

If the danger they faced were bad enough, he'd have to exert himself to the utmost. Were he to miserly hold back his power, and were they to be forced into a crisis as a result, then all that would await him would be regret.

That was not a mistake he could afford to make.

Amid this train of thought.

"Just like earlier, you sure are calm, Suimei-kun. Generally speaking, people would be just as frantic as the other guards in this kind of situation."

"Didn't those two just say that there was no need to worry?"

Suimei's mouth twitched at her words.

"You're different from them. I don't feel any hint of unease at all from you."

"I don't know, maybe I'm just putting on a brave front?"

"Again with the shameless deception."

It seemed like Lefille was not fond of his evasive answers. Recognizing this, he answered seriously.

"—Let me put it this way then: I have no intentions of losing my calm."

"Does that mean you've encountered crises like this before?"

"More or less. Even though I look like this, I have a lot of experience surviving life-and-death battles."

"Like what?"

"That's a secret."

Even though his evasive answer was slightly disappointing, Lefille nevertheless continued brightly, "You sure are a strange person. You're a pleasure to speak with most of the time, but you're completely unwilling to reveal any of your secrets."

"That's what it means to be a magician."

"If you keep it up, I'm going to pull off that mask of yours sooner or later."

"—Oh? And how do you plan to do that?"

"Haha. I've always done things the same way – with my sword."

"God forbid... You sure are scary, Lefille-san."

Suimei met Lefille's humorous, if audacious, words with his own. As the two joked with one another, Galeo, worried, interrupted.

"...Gurakis-dono. Do you not need to prepare?"

"Yeah, I'm ready to go. As long as I have this sword with me, I'm good."

"Yakagi-dono, I agreed to take you along because you're proficient with healing magic. Please don't push yourself."

Suimei scratched his head awkwardly in response to Galeo's concern.

"I appreciate your concern, but don't worry, I'll be fine."

"But..."

"When my healing services are needed, I'll pull back. I definitely won't push myself or anything like that. I never planned on doing more than my part, anyway."

"...Alright. Please be careful, okay?" Galeo replied seriously.

...Although he'd lost his head a bit earlier, he was nevertheless the leader of a caravan. It looked like those merchants that traveled between cities were actually quite reliable when it came down to it.

"—Well then, any time now."

"Yeah."

"...?"

Despite the vagueness of Suimei's words, Lefille nonetheless replied without a second thought. She took up a stance once more.

While Galeo was trying to puzzle out the meaning of this incredibly short exchange, the magician girl suddenly shouted.

"Everyone! They're almost here!"

Just as she finished speaking, the forest trees' leaves began to rustle. The sound of the wind and something passing through the trees strengthened the already nervous tension.

An adventurer, seeing Galeo glance around, and realizing that he hadn't yet understood that the battle was about to begin, called out.

"Hey, Galeo-san! Hurry up and hide, the battle's about to start!"

"R-right! Best of luck in battle!"

Galeo jumped in response before escaping to where they were to hide like a fleeing rabbit.

Afterward, the guards made their respective preparations.

Lefille, however, broke formation and advanced.

It looked like she, once again, planned to take care of it all by herself.

"Hey, Lefille."

“Don’t worry. This time, I plan to intercept them right here. Suimei-kun, when the time comes, please support me.”

“Not a problem, but how do you want to coordinate things with the others?”

“That, hmm—”

A one man show again?

Just as that thought crossed his mind again in confusion, Lefille walked out where everyone could see her and abruptly turned.

In a grand, exaggerated gesture, she plunged her sword into the ground.

The loud sound and unseen pressure turned all eyes to her.

Then—

“...I’ll be the vanguard! Everyone else, form up into a defensive formation and take out any Mazoku that get past me!” Lefille declared loudly, her actions meant to boost the morale of those who had begun to lose themselves to the fear of the Mazoku’s numbers.

Her voice almost seemed a tangible force as it resounded throughout the area.

Her voice, like rolling thunder, and her fearless, majestic aura was a match for any general.

Even if not a word was heard in reply, this definitely didn't mean that the silence was because they looked down on Lefille's resolve-filled words. On the contrary, the former pervasive, dark atmosphere had already lightened considerably.

Having been infected by the young woman's atmosphere, their frantic running and shouting had already stopped. A remarkable, high-spirited mood settled upon them, and a nervous, excited energy filled them instead.

...So this is her talent, the so-called charisma in action.

Just as Lefille displayed this surprising ability, she suddenly turned to the west.

At the same time, something flew out from the forest depths – that was without a doubt, Mazoku.

A piercing cry sounded.

"T-they're here!" someone cried out.

Still flying, the Mazoku reached them in an instant.

Suddenly, just as the Mazoku approached, Lefille dashed forward to meet them, accelerating nonstop before leaping into the air.

"HAAAAAAAAA!"

—Before the other guards could even react, Lefille had already taken the lead in attacking the enemy.

Her blade flashed. With a single slash of her sword, longer than she was tall, three of the attacking Mazoku were sent flying.

As they touched down on the ground, Lefille and Mazoku faced off against one another.

The start of this battle had been crushing for the Mazoku.

This left a strong, clear impression on Mazoku and guard alike.

The guards shouted with both surprise and delight. From their safe place where they were watching, several of the merchants mirrored their excited cries.

—Just as Lefille had seized the initiative with this stunning display.

"—?!"

Mazoku presences suddenly descended from above.

Sensing this, several people looked up.

"From above!"

The magician girl's warning was a second late as they were suddenly ambushed from above.

The Mazoku had apparently distracted them with an attack from one side while preparing to ambush them from above.

They're trying to throw the battlefield into chaos! Shit, if they break our formation, we won't be able to fix it.

This would destroy any advantage mages and archers held, and if this became a close-combat, tooth-and-nail fight, then they likely wouldn't be able to separate themselves from the enemy until the battle was over.

If they were trained in how to handle situations such as this, as soldiers were, then things would be different, of course—

In any event, this was bad.

Accordingly, Suimei prepared to invoke his magic, when suddenly—

"In that case..."

A calm and cold voice left Lefille's lips.

Accompanying her words, something happened.

"Wha—?!"

What did she just do?

Lefille's surroundings suddenly began to glow with scarlet light.

A brilliant light that seemed as though it would sweep away the darkness radiated from the young girl. This light could only be described as the phenomenon commonly known as "aura".

Concurrently, an enormous power altogether different from mana began to surge forth.

This power bathed her body, sword, and surroundings in dazzling light.

"—HAAAAA!"

Lefille slashed, as though to part to the heavens themselves.

Her sword was, of course, nowhere near long enough to reach her enemies from where she stood. As far as her enemies were concerned, she was simply slashing at the empty air. On the contrary, however, a brilliant crimson light traced the arc she drew in the air with her sword

and continued onward, slicing apart all the Mazoku before her. Their corpses dropped to the ground.

Not even stopping to take a breath between strikes, she swung her sword relentlessly. As if a sudden storm, in an instant she'd attacked all the Mazoku who had encircled her with a tornado of slashes.

For these Mazoku, having misjudged her attack distance, this sword storm was an unavoidable, demonic whirlwind. Without so much as a cry, they were transformed into a pile of corpses.

"Wha...?" Suimei mumbled in shock.

The words "one-sided slaughter" passed through his mind.

The scene before him felt unreal. If he had to say why, then it was that scarlet light.

"Hey, wait...!"

From what he knew, that light was not something that could possibly be found in the physical world.

Generally speaking, unless some external factor were to directly interfere, something like that would never manifest physically.

—The cries of the others were of a different sort than Suimei's. They, too, were unable to fully comprehend what Lefille was doing, but their shouts

were of joy.

"Amazing!"

"Hey, did you see that?! Lefille used that same technique before to chop huge monster in two with one strike, you know?!"

"...That? Lefille's used this before?"

"Eh? Yeah, she has... What about it?"

As the adventurer answered his surprised question in this manner, Suimei frowned. Perhaps because of the miraculous display happening before his eyes, he'd thought of something.

...The "huge monster" he spoke of must be the semi-giant that had been mentioned earlier.

So it's this power that defeated that thing, huh. That makes sense. If it's this power, then she should be able to kill most things with ease.

Just as she was at that moment.

"...So what about it? Something bothering you?"

"No, no. It's not like that..."

It was just that both his brain and his body seemed struck dumb by astonishment. That said, shocking though it might have been, it wasn't something to be feared.

Looking at Suimei out of the corner of his eye, a lightbulb seemed to go off in the adventurer's brain as he called out to his companions.

"Hey, stop dawdling around! Let's go help her!"

"Yes!"

Voices called out in agreement, not just those of the other members of his party, but the adventurers and other guards as well.

As this was happening, Lefille, still bathed in that bright red light, continued to slice the Mazoku in two with each strike of her sword.

"..."

Suimei, on the other hand, stayed where he was, as though frozen in place.

Although Lefille had asked him to support her when needed, from what he was witnessing now, that didn't seem necessary.

If you were to ask why, again the answer would be the red light enveloping her. In his home world, this power was known as "spirit", "telesma", or "the power of the spirits".

This was something altogether different from either mana or ether. This power found its source in spiritual beings like angels or demons, a power that was far beyond humanity, a power that came from a higher dimension.

—When it comes to higher dimensions, by the way, the wording might be a little confusing. “High” here doesn’t refer to strength, but rather to the ability to interfere with, and resist interference from, other dimensions.

Not to say that that meant it was lacking in strength in any way either. Described simply, a power that could not be stopped by physical objects wasn’t only incredibly suited for offense, it also would not fall subject to any of the opponent’s attacks either. Such a power was practically cheat-like in its existence.

While magic was different, nevertheless depending on the strength of the practitioner in question, its power could similarly be divided into advanced and higher-dimensional power.

“Spirit”, on the other hand, was fundamentally a high order power.

And so the scene before him—

Spirit transformation? No, Lefille’s a human... No, wait a minute, that’s not right... Has there been a spirit living within her body or mind all this time...?

From what he could see, she was definitely not borrowing the power of the spirits. No, this was definitely a power she possessed all on her own.

This was what had Suimei astonished beyond all belief.

From the knowledge he possessed from his original world, a spirit existing physically in the material plane – that is, the living world – was impossible.

It was definitely the case that spirits had manifested in their world before. In both myth and legend, it was possible to confirm that such things had occurred in antiquity.

In modern day, however, the “source of existence” for devils, angels, and spirits – which were together known collectively as spirits – as well as deities both good and evil, had effectively been usurped by the expansion of science. These supernatural existences of old had more or less vanished entirely, leaving only “beings possessing similar power” existing outside of their world. Aside from a few particularly well-known and named beings, including ruling gods, none others were left.

Subsequently, if one desired use of their power, it was necessary to first communicate with them from this side and establish a contract before one would be able to manifest just a portion of their power.

For this reason, what was happening before his eyes, the sight of Lefille wielding this power as her own, completely unrestricted in any way, left him completely stupefied.

Given what he was seeing, Lefille must be half-human, half-spirit, possessing the power of the spirit and the form of a human. A truly rare existence.

...Anyway, that's just a wild guess, but still.

That something like this can possibly exist... That's a fantasy world for you.

Still—

"No matter how you look at it, for her to be a spirit herself, that's just cheating..."

His surprise was to the extent that his mind had practically frozen.

That one such as he, whose goal was to delve into all the mysteries of this world, had been left in such a state was a testament to how surreal the scene before him was.

"Something of this level—!" Lefille roared as she sent more than half of the Mazoku flying, as if intending to end every last Mazoku with a single strike.

The Mazoku, on the other hand, though still demonstrating the desire to fight, had nevertheless begun to hesitate.

"Good! Lefille, keep on doing what you're doing! Kill them all!" the

guards called out happily as they saw this.

Dominance. Victory was already within sight for those assembled.

At that moment—

“W-wait! Something’s coming! Something insanely powerful!”

Perhaps sensing the movement of mana, someone among the crowd shouted. Immediately following, the magician girl screamed out a stunned warning.

“W-what is this?! It’s enormous! Everyone be careful! An enormous power is coming this way!”

From deep in the forest behind the remaining Mazoku, an explosive sound could be heard. It was as though some gigantic creature was destroying everything in its surroundings. This sound grew steadily closer.

This was a dangerous presence. The mana it radiated was on a level utterly unlike anything they’d encountered so far.

Give me a break. Things were finally just about to calm down, too...

Dammit!

Suimei cursed inwardly. The presence drawing ever nearer gave off a dense, dangerous aura. Lefille suddenly turned her head back.

“Everyone, get back! It’s coming!”

Next, as if to stomp out all hopes of their victory, the owner of that enormous power, destroying all trees in its wake, appeared on the battlefield.

Loosing a roar that shook the ground, a Mazoku with frightening presence touched down as if striking the earth.

Chapter 24: The Mazoku General

—He struck the ground like a thunderbolt.

If he hadn't landed on the ground itself, then he would have pulverized whatever had been in its place instead.

His hand resting upon the ground for support, the Mazoku slowly rose. He was substantially larger than the other Mazoku had been, and stood over two meters tall.

His arms and legs were as thick as logs, like an incarnation of violence itself. Suimei, a visitor from another world, was instantly reminded of the Oni of Japanese legend as well as the satyrs of Western mythology. He positively radiated a dense aura of menace.

The intense feeling of danger teeming in the air filled the humans' hearts with fear. This was a devil.

Even though he was still humanoid in form, and was even attired in a manner similar to humanity, but the specifics of his body couldn't have been more different.

"...Ho, looks like I've found what we've been looking for."

They couldn't understand what this Mazoku was saying. His fragmented words didn't even convey enough information to hazard a guess.

At the sudden appearance of this Mazoku, and the terrifying pressure they felt from him, the adventurers lost their minds out of fear.

“W-what... That guy is so much stronger than the others!”

“S, so powerful! The others can’t even compare...”

In an instant, they’d lost all calm. They couldn’t be blamed for that, though. Although the Mazoku that had previously appeared were frightening enough all their own, but an opponent of this level made them feel faint.

However—

Tch. This one’s on a whole different level from the other Mazoku...

Because of this new opponent, Suimei, too, began to sweat. Even if he hadn’t actually seen just how strong this new enemy actually was, but he was nevertheless shaken by the sudden appearance of such a powerful foe.

Over and over he told himself to calm down, but unexpectedly, it was hard to still his nervousness.

“Insects... You sure were full of yourselves just now.”

The Mazoku snorted, ridiculing the humans before him.

His intentions unclear, his gaze swept across the assembled humans like a tiger staring down its prey.

"...Hmph. This is different from what I heard. Don't tell me that info we received was false...? Just where did things go wrong?" The Mazoku's voice was noticeably tinged with confusion.

Nevertheless, casting his concerns aside, the Mazoku took a deep breath.

And then—

"Whatever. What I have to do hasn't changed. —Listen up, humans! My name is Rajas! I am one entrusted with the army of the glorious Maou Nakshatra, a general of the Mazoku! Having met me here, this is the end of the road for all of you! Obediently await your death at my hands!"

His voice shook both air and ground. The guards, already trembling before this, felt their terror grow.

"H, hii..."

A fearful whimper escaped someone's lips. The others felt as though it could well have been them. The only word that could describe their current situation was despair.

" ... "

In contrast, Lefille, standing at the forefront of the human guards, simply stood unmoving before the Mazoku known as Rajas.

This couldn't be. Even someone such as she was unable to withstand the menace of this Mazoku?

Their eyes turning to this young girl who was serving as the vanguard, the gazes of the others started to show distinct unease.

Just then.

Lefille's emotions flared.

"YOU BASTAAAAAARD!"

An earth-shaking yell that in no way lost out to Rajas. A roar filled with deep fury, that cast off the fear holding the others in its grip. Red light shining once more, Lefille attacked.

"Oh?"

In the face of that whirlwind of red, Rajas revealed a fearless smile. He thrust out his fist to meet the attack head-on.

Lefille's slash was, of course, accompanied by that crimson light, but her strike was unable to reach Rajas' massive hand. Two enormous powers collided, exploding in a shower of sparks.

Her colossal blade had been stopped by the dark energy surrounding Rajas' fist, and in the end, it never made contact with his arm.

It had been a full-powered, decisive strike. The Mazoku responded with a sneer, though one that carried a hint of praise.

"Not bad, little girl."

"Of course! Do you remember this sword?"

"Hmm? Your sword?"

"—Tsk. Rajas. Don't tell me you've forgotten me already!"

Unlike the radiance that had come from her before, naked anger now flowed forth from her.

From what she just said, it looks like that Rajas guy has some sort of past with her—

The Mazoku swung his arm, knocking aside her sword.

Lefille landed firmly upon the ground and reset her stance.

The Mazoku squinted at her, and then as if suddenly recalling where he'd met her before, laughed uproariously.

“—Ahahahahahaha! I see now! I remember you now, little girl! You’re that survivor of Noshias from that time, right?!”

“Eh...?”

“Huh...?”

From the Mazoku’s mouth had come the name “Noshias.” At this name, the others – the party of adventurers included – suddenly reacted.

Noshias was that country that was destroyed by the Mazoku. So she escaped from there. I guess that’s where she met that Mazoku?

Her emotions seizing control of her person, Lefille yelled back, “...That’s right! Now you remember!”

“Hahaha! Man, I’d totally figured you’d have died in the wilderness somewhere. To think you were still alive! Everyone else died, after all!”

“You bastard!”

The Mazoku’s pleased smile caused Lefille to unleash another ferocious strike.

She’d completely lost herself to her rage, and lost all sense of self. Her blade was now infused with an intense energy of a degree completely beyond that which it had before possessed.

Unfortunately, the Mazoku's power was every bit its equal. Corrupt power enveloped his fist, which blocked Lefille's fierce attack. Just then, having lost her calm, the girl showed an opening.

"—Your movements are too repetitive!"

"Oh—" she called out unconsciously as her vision filled with the sight of that massive fist.

The situation was dire. The Mazoku's fist, brimming with dark energy, shot directly toward her.

If she were to get hit by that, even a spirit such as herself would not emerge unscathed.

"Tch—"

The others were frozen in suspense. That meant the only one left who could possibly turn things around was Suimei.

Clicking his tongue, Suimei activated a magic and pulled the frozen Lefille away from the incoming punch.

"Wha—?!"

"Eh—?"

Both the one who had just narrowly avoided the attack and the one whose attack had just missed cried out in surprise.

Right before the moment of impact, Suimei had darted out. Because his magic had been so hastily enacted, he hadn't been able to create much distance between her and Rajas. That meant that Lefille was still well within Rajas' attack range.

Accordingly, he could only advance and use his own body to defend against the incoming attack.

"Suimei-kun! You can't! Get back!"

"A nobody like you dares to challenge me?!"

The shockwave created by Rajas' savage attack pounded into Suimei's body. Suimei endured the pressure as he raced toward the Mazoku at the greatest speed he was capable of mustering.

At the same time, his eyes never left his opponent's fist. The Mazoku's shoulder moved. The Mazoku had unleashed another punch, one that could surely smash him to bits.

Can I do what I did last time and seize the opportunity to throw him? No, that's far too dangerous. Given the tremendous energy emanating from that fist, even the slightest contact would have disastrous consequences. Yes, that was a very bad idea indeed.

Suimei leapt upward, dodging the incoming blow, and raced up the length of the Mazoku's arm, his speed never dropping. By the time the arm had fully extended, he'd already reached the top of its body.

"Fu—"

Suimei released an earth-shattering kick on the Mazoku's shoulder with the entirety of what mana he had been able to gather in these few instants.

From his foot a strong sense of feedback came: it'd been a good hit. Nevertheless, Rajas was completely unharmed.

All Suimei had managed to accomplish had been to force Rajas' legs deeper into the ground.

—Shit. Even a solid hit like that is useless, huh.

The adventurers' swords had been decidedly effective against the Mazoku, but this was all he had been able to do. How annoying. Was there something he was missing? Usually an attack like that would have split his victim wide open from the shoulders on down. Something was strange here.

Such rude thoughts ran through Suimei's mind even as his body fluttered through the air.

"You little punk!"

A roar accompanied Rajas' massive fist. Even if it wasn't completely aimed, it nevertheless still had enough power, or rather, more than enough, to kill him five times over.

Lefille faced off directly against this kind of power? That's a spirit for you. I'm in awe.

"—Via gravitas" (—Gravity road, take shape.)

Via gravitas. Faced with an incoming attack, he activated his magic with a single phrase, forcing his body to the ground with utmost haste. His peripheral vision caught hold of Rajas' leg kicking straight toward him.

"—?!"

In the blink of an eye, Suimei was behind him.

Watching his foe dodge what he had been sure was a certain-kill attack, Rajas' face was filled with shock. His kick landed a moment later, accompanied by an enormous crack, completely uprooting the trees in the area impacted by his attack.

I wish this guy would control his strength a little, Suimei sighed as he retreated before Rajas could turn around.

Placing some distance between them, Suimei's pace slowed as he continued to observe his opponent, brutal to the extreme.

Appearing before his squinting eyes was the rear view of the Mazoku. Its gigantic frame was accompanied by physique that was a step above that of humanity, and boasted a menacing strength. Its mana levels were an entirely different level from the other Mazoku and a pitch black, foul energy coursed around its body.

That dark power flowed forth from its body wasn't something that any living creature should naturally possess.

Finally, Rajas turned around and their gazes met. In the next instant, Suimei had lost his opponent, dodging to the side.

"Sh—" Rajas muttered unconsciously, having been toyed with by Suimei.

Again, that massive arm came rushing toward him. In that case—

"—Omissa vicissim" (Reverse heaven and earth.)

"What?!"

His magic inverted space within a designated area. His target thus dropped headfirst into the ground.

He, of course, wasn't expecting this to inflict any damage, but rather had intended to gain himself a precious few seconds.

To earn himself the time to chant this next incantation, that is.

Leaping backward, he shouted, "—Abreq aaaaa!"

His incantation was nevertheless interrupted.

That was because an avalanche of dirt and stone came rushing toward him.

"A clod of earth, is it..." he muttered unconsciously, his indifferent tone shaking slightly.

He waved an arm at the incoming mass.

In the blink of an eye, this massive clump of earth parted like the Red Sea before the arms of Moses.

Immediately thereafter, he came into contact with the remnants of that dark power.

...It's hard to breathe.

Indeed, "evil" was an extremely accurate description for this power. This was a power antithetical to humanity, its mere presence was enough to cause instinctive revulsion.

It looked like calling upon power from outside of this world was rather

effective. The magic he had just tried was definitely the key.

...Once again, the two enemies faced off.

One side stuck his arms into his pockets while the other, having been toyed with as he had been, was surprisingly calm.

I guess that's a general for you. He knows how to keep his cool.

Brushing off the dirt from his body, Rajas spoke.

"Not bad for a punk. Even though you're a mage, you seem quite capable."

"Thanks."

"But these glancing blows aren't any use—"

"Glancing blows? From where I stand, you've just been swinging at the empty air. What are your thoughts on that?"

"Shut your mouth. Seeing as you can't hurt me at all, I wouldn't be so arrogant if I were you."

He'd laughed off his provocations. This wasn't an opponent that would let down his guard.

Lefille, having returned to a battle-ready state, reached his side—

“Suimei-kun! Please be careful! Once he gets serious, this guy’s power isn’t anything like this!”

“...Are you kidding me? He’s still not being serious and it’s already like this? Heavens, have mercy...” Suimei muttered gloomily, not caring that his comments were ill-suited to the situation.

Rather, he really was beginning to feel depressed.

Rajas looked like he hadn’t even worked up a sweat. Given what Lefille had said, it was quite possible that he hadn’t even brought out 50% of his true power.

“If he wants to, then this whole area... —!”

“Oi oi, this guy is that dangerous?”

“Yes, even my slashes with this sword aren’t bothering him in the least. You can’t afford to be careless.”

Judging by the white-knuckled grip she had on her sword, she seemed to have been remembering something particularly unpleasant. Actually, that had to be the case. There’s no way she didn’t have a memory like that.

“Hahaha, exactly. You’re just a human mage, don’t get too full of

yourself..."

"Ku—"

Lefille groaned at the sudden swell of power. In her eyes, a trace of apprehensiveness appeared.

...If his enemy possessed a power of this degree, then he couldn't afford to just let things continue like this. He would act before things passed the point of no return.

And so...

"Archatius over—" (Mana furnace, charge—)

—Just as Suimei began his incantation, the situation suddenly changed.

Rajas, who he was sure was about to attack, instead looked over at Lefille and laughed.

"Kukukuku..."

"What's so funny?!"

"Oh, it's nothing. I just thought of something fun."

" 'Something fun?' "

Rajas didn't bother to answer as he took to the sky.

"I'll take my leave from the battlefield for now."

"Wh—?!"

"Don't forget, though, girl from Noshias – your power doesn't mean the tiniest thing before us. Once I gather all my subordinates in the area, I'll be back!"

"Subordinates...? That's..."

"This was just one part of my forces. Just a tiny fraction, really. Do remember that," Rajas added, as Lefille could barely speak. "Don't bother hoping for salvation though. I've brought an enormous army with me, and my orders were to 'Crush all human opposition without mercy'."

With that, Rajas turned and left with the other surviving Mazoku.

Lefille started to give chase, but as she began to rush off—

"W-wait!"

"Lefille!"

"—!"

Suimei grabbed her shoulder. Her actions were meaningless.

She flipped him a look that asked why he was stopping her. He shook his head. Seemingly understanding, she finally seemed to regain control of herself.

"Are you okay?" Suimei asked with concern.

"Yeah, sorry... I lost my cool," she answered regretfully.



As things calmed down in the wake of the Mazoku's departure, Suimei shifted to the task that had been awaiting him.

Healing. While there were other magicians capable of restorative magic, their knowledge of these was only on par with Suimei. Adding in the knowledge of curative magic he'd brought from his own world, his abilities far surpassed theirs.

"Whew. With this, we're done," he sighed, having finished up with the last person who had needed to be healed.

Because healing wasn't his specialty, there were still some places where he could stand to improve, but his self-evaluation of his healing ability was still rather high.

The guard he had just healed swung his arm a few times in test as he thanked him, "Sorry about this, Mage onii-san."

"Not at all, this is what I'm here for, after all."

At this answer, the guard laughed happily.

"Still, you're pretty amazing. That magic you used just now healed my wound without even leaving a scar, and I can even use my arm right away. I've never seen such a perfected healing technique."

"It's not common to be able to move the affected body part after healing?"

"That, huh. Well, with small wounds, sure, but not with larger ones. That's common knowledge, right?"

"Huh."

That was unexpected.

From what he'd said, Suimei surmised that the restriction was due to the fact that mages were only healing what they could see. Although the visible wound was healed, that nevertheless did not mean the healing had been complete.

"Is that not how you're doing it?"

"You could say that."

Suimei gave an ambiguous reply.

When it came to this issue, further investigation was warranted.

On a different note.

"—Is it just me, or has it gotten really noisy over there?"

A little ways off merchants and guards were gathered and were making a racket.

"...Yeah. Maybe we're about to leave? Would that be why?" the guard guessed unconcernedly.

From what Rajas had said, his Mazoku soldiers had already begun to gather. This wasn't the time to be leisurely taking their time, they needed to leave.

This clamor though, what was causing it?

"Well, your healing's already finished, so why don't we go take a look?"

"Sure."

His back to the guard, Suimei headed in the direction of the racket.

As he arrived, he noticed a tension in the atmosphere.

What was the cause of this? This question plaguing his thoughts, he continued to observe the situation, taking note of the fact that the guards and merchants seemed to have someone surrounded.

The one surrounded was none other than the one who had been courageously engaged in battle until just now – Lefille.

Typically speaking, one who had heroically and singlehandedly dominated the Mazoku as she had would be treated with great respect, but the mood dominating the crowd was that of nervousness and unease. The scene simply could not in any way be seen as congratulatory in nature.

Surrounded as she was, Lefille opened her mouth to speak, intending to dispel the atmosphere.

"...Why have you asked me to come here? There are other things that should take precedence, no?" Lefille asked as her gaze took in the faces of those encircling her.

An adventurer stepped forward.

"And what would that be?"

"To move somewhere safer, obviously. If we dawdle here, there's a good

chance the Mazoku will attack again."

"Attack again..."

His words were filled with deep, dark emotion.

At his response, Lefille repeated her suggestion, more forcefully this time.

"What? Is there something you want to say? If so, then just say it alr—"

"Yeah, I do. The Mazoku attacked us because of you, didn't they? You're a survivor of Noshias, right?"

"—!"

"...What do you mean 'just say it already'? Stop playing dumb. This is all your fault! It's all your fault that we were attacked, that we were targeted by the Mazoku!" the adventurer spat.

The harsh words left Lefille hesitant and uncertain.

"C-certainly we were targeted, but it has nothing to do with me..."

"And how do you know that?"

"..."

Lefille was left speechless in the face of their malice.

Even though Rajas had certainly said that he'd an eye on her, but there was no way to know that that was why the Mazoku had attacked.

The adventurer's certainty wasn't justified, but without evidence to the contrary, she couldn't exactly refute his claims either.

"That Mazoku was hunting for you, wasn't he? We were all dragged into this because he wants you dead."

"T-that's..."

" 'That's...' what? If you have an explanation, then spit it out already!"

She couldn't respond, bowing her head instead.

Unable to prove that she was innocent of the accusation, she could only keep her silence. Suimei, however, knew how to rebut their claims.

"Can I say something?"

"Huh?"

"When we were fighting that Mazoku earlier, didn't he tell Lefille, 'I remember you now'? In other words, only then did he notice that Lefille

was present here. That being the case, there's no way they came here intentionally targeting her from the very beginning."

Unfortunately.

"Ha, that's your proof?! That has nothing to do with anything!"

"And why the hell not...?!"

The adventurer had already lost the ability to make rational judgments. He was too sure that he was right.

Gesticulating wildly, he continued.

"That's because they just had some general intel on her whereabouts! Only after searching the area did they find who they were looking for! Or do you have proof to the otherwise?!"

His argument was that they only knew the general location of their enemy and that her precise whereabouts had only become clear after the first attack. To be sure, that explanation did explain some things—

"Moreover, don't you remember what this girl said after we were ambushed? She knew that our attackers were Mazoku! Why would she know that?! They could very well have been monsters or magical beasts! No, there's an easy way to explain her certainty – she already knew that there were Mazoku hunting her!"

—It was only then that Suimei noticed. This was the adventurer who'd come to warn them of the attack. At this moment, the memory of his doubting gaze came to mind.

However.

"Hmph. Preposterous. That was just because Lefille is sensitive to the Mazoku's presence."

"You may be right, but... Do you have any evidence of that?"

"That—"

What a leading manner of questioning. With questions like that, Suimei couldn't really answer.

If he were to ask Suimei to produce evidence of his claims, then Suimei, of course, would not be able to do so.

Plus, given the current mob mentality, even if he had managed to produced the evidence asked for, it wouldn't have changed a thing.

"You can't do it, can you? Then scram."

"What...?"

Every new word from the man irritated Suimei more and more.

The man's provocative tone and words sent his blood pressure soaring.

The wall of people parted, and a man appeared.

"Hold it, you two!"

"Galeo-san..."

They turned in the direction of the new voice. The roar had come from the merchants' leader – Galeo.

"You're all here to guard the caravan. If dissension breaks out among the ranks, it's going to cause problems for others. Your argument ends now."

"If the argument is to end, does that mean you've already decided on a plan of action, Galeo-san?"

"Yes. I'm the head of this caravan. I'll take charge of judging this case."

"O-oh..."

The adventurer could only nod his head when faced with Galeo's decisive words and attitude. Even though he was rather small in stature, he was nevertheless the leader of a caravan. His character far surpassed that of this adventurer.

"Is that acceptable to everyone else?" Galeo asked the others.

They all nodded. The complaining voices directed at Lefille were thus silenced.

Confirming that the outburst had ended, he turned to Lefille and spoke coldly.

"...Gurakis-san, I'm the leader of this caravan. That means that I must place the safety of this group first and foremost."

He hadn't explicitly stated his conclusion yet, but everyone knew where he was going with this.

Explaining this in full seriousness, he meant to—

"We've been targeted by the Mazoku, and you are the reason. As the one responsible for this group, I can't just leave this situation alone. Do you know what I mean?"

"I do. I understand. You want me to go."

"—?!"

"That is correct."

His roundabout manner of speaking notwithstanding, Lefille had understood what he was getting at. Galeo nodded at her response. Responding to the turn of events, the crowd began to murmur once more.

"Of course!"

"Get the hell out of here!"

"You jinx!"

Overly cruel words. Regardless of whether or not Lefille had indeed been the cause for the attacks, she had never intended to bring harm to the caravan. In any event, the one in greatest danger at the moment was her. The one they should be most concerned about was her.

That was how it should have been, anyway. This manner of kicking someone when they were down was going way too far.

Suimei could restrain himself no longer.

"Hey! You're just going to force her out all alone?!"

"Of course we are! The Mazoku were targeting us because of this girl, you know?! Staying together with this girl means going up against that Mazoku general and his army!"

"Even so! If she's all alone, what's she going to do about food and

water?!"

Even putting the Mazoku issue aside, this was another important facet of things.

Whether or not you were traveling alone, food and water were a matter of life and death. Ensuring that you had sufficient provisions to last was a necessary part of travel.

Since the caravan was fundamentally for the purpose of transport, carrying along large amounts of food and water was a non-problem. This was not the case for a lone person, however.

If you were to either misjudge either the amount of provisions needed or the distance to be traveled, then it was quite possible to run out of supplies before you'd reached your destination.

Without anywhere to stay along the road, the danger posed to her by exiling Lefille from the group at this point was easy enough to imagine.

The adventurer didn't seem to care, though.

"I don't know anything about that! It has nothing to do with us, anyway!"

He actually said something like that.

Suimei turned to the others.

"...And you all feel similarly?" he couldn't help but ask, though he knew the answer even before he spoke.

As he'd expected, his question was met with cold words and colder gazes.

"...Tch."

His teeth gritted in response. The adventurer looked at him with contempt before saying something truly outrageous.

"And? How long are you going to pretend? I know that, deep down, you also think this girl should get the hell out. Am I wrong?"

"WHAT?! I would never—"

"Pretending to be her friend this whole time, you're too far to back out now? Or what? Deceived by her good looks? I guess there's that, she is pretty – at least on the outside."

"Wh—"

"Hmph. Not only did she bring the Mazoku upon us, but she's also the kind of woman who leads men astray—"

This last line was the straw that broke the camel's back for Suimei, his rage boiling over as coldness seized his heart.

I won't be silent.

No matter what, his vulgarity had gone too far; he'd done something which Suimei was simply incapable of doing.

That's why it couldn't be helped if Suimei, unable to control himself any longer, raised his fingers toward the adventurer, preparing to snap them.

"What? You want to start something?"

Not realizing the perilous situation he was in, the adventurer said something fatally stupid. In just a second more, that smug smile would be wiped from his face—

Suddenly, Suimei, about to give form to his fury, was stopped by Lefille.

"—Stop it, Suimei-kun!"

"..."

"What do you think you're doing?! This won't change anything!"

"Tch..."

Lefille's words of restraint brought Suimei back to his senses. Thinking it over, he came to the same conclusion – his actions wouldn't change the

end result. Her exit was already inevitable, something that was obvious to anyone thinking calmly.

In order to reduce the risk to the caravan as much as possible, it was necessary for her to leave.

His voice tinged with regret, Galeo spoke.

"Gurakis-san. We're going to leave now. I think you know what you need to do..."

"I do. I'll head in a direction different from the one the caravan takes, I understand."

"That's right," was his only response. This was necessary to minimize risk to the group.

As the two spoke, Suimei abruptly turned to the adventurer party that was well acquainted with Lefille.

The magical girl who had laughed and chatted happily with her and the warrior who had praised her ability. At this time, their gazes, like the others were estranged. They weren't even willing to meet Lefille's eyes, let alone come to her aid.

Suimei, however, couldn't blame them. They were afraid of the Mazoku army. If they were to ignore the feelings of the others and protect Lefille, then who could say what the consequences would be? Plus, it wasn't like they could be sure that Lefille wasn't in fact the target of the Mazoku.

In such a situation, they could only prioritize their own safety. Suimei didn't intend to criticize their cowardice, however; he, of all people, did not have that right.

...At long last, negotiations over provisions settled, Lefille called out to Suimei.

"Lefille..."

"...Our time together has been short, Suimei-kun, but I'll pray for your safety."

"..."

How can she smile at a time like this? His gaze fixed on her smile, he wanted to ask, "Is this really okay?" but he knew that she'd simply reply that it was.

She turned away. The sight of that back, carrying that large sword with such ease, carried no trace of the reliability that it had once shown. No, burned into his vision now was the fading figure of a young girl who looked every bit her age.

And that's why—

"Hey, let's get going."

Right, and that's why—

"Hey, did you hear me?"

Right, this is different from that time with Reiji and the others.

Yeah, this is no different from forsaking Lefille.

Lefille, and that vulnerable, retreating back and gaze, would thus be abandoned to a lonely hell without so much as a single hand outstretched to her.

"...Give me my provisions."

Before he realized it, the words had already left his mouth.

"Huh?" the adventurer said in shock.

His gaze still following Lefille, Suimei continued.

"I'm going with her. Thanks for watching over me until now."

"Huh?" the adventurer repeated.

Galeo sighed.

"Are you really okay with this? If you leave us now, you won't be rewarded for the commission, you know?"

"I don't need that sort of thing, but I do need food and water. Consider it payment for my work up to this point if you wouldn't mind."

"...I understand. Take care of yourself out there, Yakagi-san," Galeo replied, his eyes closed, giving in without trying to persuade him otherwise.

If he did not possess this sort of calm, disinterested disposition he could never have made it as a caravan leader.

"What's this? In the end, you still—"

—*BOOM*

Without getting to finish, the adventurer was sent flying by Suimei's magic. He'd already lost all patience and had no desire to allow the man's vulgarity to further offend his ears.

"Hey, are you really going to be okay...?" the warrior asked, concern on his face.

"Yeah, don't worry about it," Suimei replied, filling his bag with provisions.

Translator Changed to :

<https://soratranslationsblog.wordpress.com/>

Chapter 25 - Expectations from an unexpected place
(part-01, part-02 and part-03 Unedited)

Author’s note:

Thank you for reading Isekai Mahou Wa Okureteru.

After thinking for a while, I think the result of all that thinking is that I’ll close the impression column until Lefille ark ends.*

At this rate it seems I won’t be able to write ... So after the completion of Lefille ark I’ll take the criticisms solemnly/seriously. *

I apologize to the readers who always report wrong words, omitted letters and the readers who always writes cheering messages.

Since this matter is solely because of my mental weakness as a human being, so if you have any opinion regarding this matter, then again when the Lefille ark ends please(onegaishimasu).

Though I’m being selfish, please forgive me.

.....

Immediately after Lefille went to confirm the presence of mazoku. At that moment in the silent surrounding an angry voice could be heard.

「—Suimei was used as a decoy ! ! 」

That was the angry shout of Reiji as if bursting open.

“There is no need to worry”.After those words which followed from Gregory’s mouth was really an unbelievable story. After listening to this Reiji quickly went and grabbed his collar

There was no signs of the respect towards the knight that was expressed a little while ago.

Seeing the angry expression of the person who is called a hero, Gregori froze up in fear.

「Ha、Ha.....」

「Is it true ! 」

「Wa、Ha ! Everything as I’ve said」

「Wha..... ! 」(「なっ、.....っ ! 」if anyone has an idea please help)

Reiji was at a loss for words listening to the words which were not even worth becoming a joke to be the truth.

He’s been biting his lips almost from the time he grabbed the knight’s collar.

Until now an absent minded Titania, surprised, comes to stop Reiji.

「Please calm down Reiji sama ! 」

「Bu、but ! 」

「Gregory was still in the middle of his story. Let’s listen to him until he finishes.....」

「.....All right」

There were some logic to Titania's words. As she said, certainly Gregory was in the middle of his explanation. He only said 「Because of using Suimei dono as a decoy, there are no dangers here. 」

That's all. A detailed explanation has not been heard yet.

..... However as far as Reiji himself was concerned, that one sentence was more than important enough to him.

The talk was accepted, and seeing this Titania heaved a sigh of relief.

And then, regaining her composure, Titania who is normally a gentle girl, unexpectedly looked at Gregory severely and commands him.

「Gregory—. Speak. Do you understand?」

「.....Yes」(Ha ha)

Along with his answer to her, he kneeled down in front of her.

Gregory who regained himself. In front of the sharp piercing gaze of the girl he started to shudder. He began to talk again while sweat started to form on his forehead.

「.....I heard this story from the communication personnel of last time whom I met. According to him, to defeat the hero a large army led the Mazoku was heading towards the vicinity of Aster. To let the Hero dono

safely escape from that army Suimei dono was used as a decoy.」

That is the rough story. But, the story more he hear more it becomes incomprehensible to him.*

Why, why did it become like this, there are mountain of things I want to ask.

Before Reiji could ask anything, Mizuki who was wearing a gloomy expression, appeared in front of Gregory in a hurry and asked him.

「Ano' using Suimei kun as a decoy, in the end what does it actually mean? Don't tell me it actually means, to make Suimei kun the decoy.....」

「Yes (Hai). About this matter Suimei dono doesn't know anything.」

What came out of Gregory's mouth was in a sense expected. However to actually execute it it was quite difficult.* Suimei himself doesn't know that he became the decoy. In spite of that he was made into a decoy. Then naturally a question comes up.

「.....Then how come Suimei can be made into a decoy? Don't tell me everything towards his trail will be attacked?」*

「About that, it seems it was matched with Suimei dono's departure.....」

「Matched with his departure?」

When Reiji asked back. Mizuki as if matching to it expresses a

bewildered expression.*

「Wha? what? Why? Suimei kun never said anything about leaving the city?」

When they left the castle. Suimei said that he would leave the castle and live in the city as he wished. Because it was hard for him to be in Camelia. That's why, Mizuki's doubt is justifiable because what they heard just now didn't match with what they knew.

Then, Gregory cleared his throat while his face was covered in sweat.* And he answered Mizuki's question.

「After we left, information about Suimei dono searching for a request to guard a business caravan came in 」

「Suimei in the adventurer guild ? 」（desuka? indicates question）

「Yes. According to the information, Several days after Suimei dono left the castle he already became a member of the adventurer's guild Twilight Pavilion. From there it is speculated that, Suimei dono probably from the very beginning intended to leave the city. But I don't know the reason why Suimei dono left the city..... and then, learning about this matter the nobles who were concerned with the demon lord subjugation decided to use Suimei dono as.....」

So they used him.*

But, what happened to Suimei? He didn't want to go with us because he wanted to stay safe, that's he was suppose to have chosen to stay in

the castle town.

Nevertheless, he immediately left, after registering into a guild and receiving a request, without any purpose/plan he wouldn't have done that.

「I wonder, what's wrong with Suimei kun.....? Going out of the city is dangerous, he should have known this」

「I don't know. But since it's Suimei, I think he must have some kind of plan」*

「Yeah.....」

Seeing Mizuki anxiously moving her pupils, Reiji again asked Gregory.

「And, what is the destination of that business caravan?」

「According to the information left in the guild, it's destination is Nelferian Empire via the city of Kurand 」

「That's.....almost the same path that we've taken」

It's just as Titania said.

That's right. On the way even though we didn't stop in the City of Kurand, the distance Suimei traveled must be the same as the distance

we've traveled from Nelferian toward Sadias.

If that's the case, then there is one possibility which arises.

「Is it possible, that Suimei kun is coming chasing after us?」

「.....Coming after us, that's not totally unthinkable but.」*

It isn't that, that possibility didn't exist. However, even if that possibility is applied, it doesn't feel satisfactory.

Yakagi Suimei is a swordsman. He wasn't a man who change his plans just because he was feeling lonely or anxious. Besides, if he had a reason where he had to come after us, he would've definitely reported it to the castle personnel directly.*

That's why I don't understand. First of all the motive is unclear. But, even if I trouble myself over it here there won't be any conclusion.*

Leaving that talk aside, Reiji again asked Gregory.

「.....Maa. I understand the reason why Suimei was used as a decoy. But why did the nobles do something like that? It wasn't particularly necessary to forcefully make Suimei a decoy」

So, if the Mazoku came leading an army, since I don't have any power to fight right now, it would've been wise for us to escape. Then it's okay to escape.

There wasn't any good reason for which Suimei must become the

decoy.

「Hero dono. What is approaching is a large scale army of the Mazoku. I don't know why, hopefully the army's pace is slow, even so the opponents are Mazoku. In relation to that marching army, the combined human army is not something that can be compared (TN-sorry little confused around here). If by any chance, Hero dono you were to get captured or something else were to happen to you, lord Hardias」

「E..... Hardias, the duke ! ? 」

「Wha.....」

To Titania's surprised voice Gregory bows his head ashamed.*

What, Hardias that duke? If I remember correctly, it should be a name I heard long time ago.

But no matter how hard Reiji tried he couldn't remember.

Part 02

Therefore, he asked Titania who should be knowledgeable about this.*

「Sorry Tia, who exactly is duke Hardias? 」

「.....Duke Hardias is a major noble of Aster, he is the one who is in charge of the affairs related to this time's demon king subjugation. In other words, inside Asteru he is a person who has the authority to decide strategies which will help us. The demon king subjugation won't be easy, and if there are a lot of people involved in planning it may become disorganized, that's why when father made the list of people suitable for the task, he was the very first person on the list.....」

「Then the person who made Suimei a decoy, is him?」

When asked again, Titania nods heavily without any proof.

And the person who knew the circumstances was Gregory.

「.....Indeed. It is as you said. It was the decision of a section of nobles, who are cooperating with lord Hardias in regards to the demon lord subjugation. Of course they are not doubting Hero sama's strength. I'm told that, it was decided that it's still early for Hero dono to confront an army even with a properly prepared support troop, that's why such a plan was adopted. 」

「.....Still, it doesn't seem to be a reason enough to forcibly make Suimei

into a decoy?」(TLN: narimassen yo? used as a question here)

「About that, it's not clear why the Mazoku were able to sense the existence of Hero dono. The Mazoku captured by the underlings of lord Hardias declared rudely that he came to kill the Hero, even after interrogation the reason is yet to be found, therefore.....is it possible to use Suimei dono who is also a summoned person to create disturbance? such a question aroused. So we spread false information to the Mazoku, so that every one of them target Suimei dono.」*

Certainly it may be effective. Since we did not come into contact with the Mazoku army, means that they are completely oblivious to our location, but it's a fact that they know of our existence.

If, what if. Suppose the Mazoku side has the means to sense the hero summoning, regardless of the fact of such a thing's existence, it's worth taking such a measure, if the Mazoku side regards the existence called hero as a threat, like this time they sent an army based on the rough location, the possibility of defeat is not at all few.**

But first, there is a information that must be known.**

It's called timing.

「.....First time we went somewhere other than the castle was during the parade, even if the Mazoku found out during that time, things to develop this far — is it even possible? 」

「Yeah, it's hard to imagine. Just as mizuki said it's too early.」

「Yeah.」

Therefore, it is possible that there are people with such power inside the Mazoku group.

If that's is the case, it's crating problems.

「How did duke Hardias was able to spread false information to the Mazoku group.....? Don't tell me there is an acquaintance inside the demon's side ?—How did he manage it?」(TLN: 一体どうやった？」confused)

Uncharacteristically Reiji gaave Gregory a hard look.

If it was between humans than spying might be possible, but if the opponent is the Mzoku is'nt it bad/impossible.**

Even if information were to be sent from the human side to the Mazoku side, it's authenticity would be doubted. Probably before believing the Mazoku doesn't have any reason to heaar it. In other words there is no connections. Therefore, there must be some way(plan) to spread the false information, it's hard to imagine but there must be some secret collusion somehow or other.

「From the story of the communication personnel, a soldier was sent to the Charlotte dock as a messenger. The soldier who was unaware of the Mazoku group was made to remember false information, that the summoned hero was presently hiding his identity heading towards the city of Kurand with the business caravan」

「Wha... ! ? 」（TLN: Confused with this one 「なっ ! ? 」）

「That, don't tell me that.....*」

Mizuki's trembling voice caused horrible imaginations to stirred up. She seemed to have accurately understood what Gregory was trying to say. Her face went blue with an expression of unease. To such Mizuki, Gregory with a bitter face answered with a voice filled with regret and disgust.

「.....The soldier who only knew false information were to be caught by the Mazoku group, then he would spill the false information to them. Therefore, if the soldier were to be only told of false information, then if he were to confess then only those false information would come out of his mouth. If the Mazoku learned this information, then this plan would succeed, that's why this plan was passed at the very beginning.....」

「What a thing.....」

「It's awful.....」

It seems both of them got a really great shock. Titania with her hand in front of her mouth stopped talking halfway, and Mizuki face seemed like she would start crying at any momment.

In front of such girls Reiji pointed his resentments toward Gregory.

「A soldier.....to treat a human like that.....isn't that too unreasonable ! What do you think a person's life is ! 」

「He, Hero dono and the soldier's lives can't be compared on the same scale. To save a few soldier or Hero dono who will save everybody, if you

look at the big picture there is no need think about it」

「Like that Suimei was also..... ! 」

「Even the people in the business caravan doesn't have anything to do with this. Despite that.....」

Gregory who heard Reiji's angry voice filled with fury and Mizuki's grieving voice, didn't say anymore than that and kept silent.

Towards such him, who confessed everything Reiji felt a sour feeling in his stomach, he dropped his manner of speech and asked a question.

「.....Other than that, wasn't there any other way ? 」

「By the time I heard the story, the Mazoku army was already halfway into the Charlotte dock's territory and approaching the mountains near the border. By then no other plan could be used.....」

「If you knew all that for a long time (for a while) why didn't you say anything up until now ! 」

「It couldn't be helped Hero dono! I was ordered not to tell anything until the time came, a mere knight such as myself doesn't have the authority to disobey such an orderbesides, by the time I heard this story the plan was already」

So nothing could be done , Gregory who said that, towards him Mizuki who was seized worry told.

「Su, such.....then Suimei kun is」

Part 03

「.....Most probably they have already came in contact with the Mazoku. In the information regarding Suimei dono it included only that he wears strange clothes since he doesn't have special features, also only the rough location of the business caravan was told, there was no definite information, If someone were apply these information to find someone on the route from the imperial city Meteru to Kurant city then.....」

「Bu, but ! If he run away and hide himself somewhere.....」

「It will be difficult, somehow hands of the Mazoku extends till the Neruferia empire. If you think about that, then the scale of the Mazoku army must be considerable. If there is a specific location, it is thoutht that they will search it thoroughly. If that happens then the people of business caravan who knew nothing.....」

「That sort of.....」

「Suimei.....」

「.....」

Hearing Gregory's conjectures, each individuals were attacked by a hard express felling. There was no words , was it sorrow, despair or perhaps both. Both Mizuki and Titania thought since it was like that, there is no way Suimei is safe.

I who said this also think that way.

Suimei is definitely an astute person, but that doesn't mean that he will be able come out of this situation unharmed.

No, perhaps he won't be able to come out. No matter how much he knows kenjutsu, after all Suimei is just a normal high school student, he doesn't have the divine protection from being summon, neither does he know how to use magic. It's better if it's a small monster, but there is no way he can stand up to the Mazoku.

.....It's vexing, however the situation is already hopeless, I ask as if spilling the words.

「.....Why now?」

「Now meaning.....?」

「Telling us about this.」

Gregory at that time murmured that the timing was good. Then it means that he surmised that it's perfect timing to speak.

—What on earth fulfilled the conditions to speak?

「Yes. We must have you Hero dono reach a safety zone before the main force of the Mazoku army appear. It mustn't be too late to speak, but if revealing came too early.....with due respect hero dono I don't know what actions you would have taken. That's why——」

「Does that mean now there isn't anything that can be done ! 」

「Indeed ! I'm sorry.」

Understanding the infuriating powers from the words, Gregory curled up prostrate himself.

To such him Titania asked.

「Gregory—。Does otousama knows about this?」

「.....Supposedly he doesn't know. It seems his Majesty specifically took a liking to Suimei dono, most probably lord Hardias fearing he would anger the king didn't tell him.....」

「Is that so.....」

Tiatania whose heart was rapidly beating heaved a slight sigh of relief. When you think your own father took part in something so cruel, one would be really worried.

Did the uneasiness of a certain one cleared a little even if it's only a little.

There it seems Titania heard something for the first time. She asked Gregory.

「Nevertheless, what did you mean by otousama took specific liking towards Suimei?」

「Yes. During the conference the talk about Suimei dono's departure came, the duke and the others vehemently opposed it, his Majesty pressed it and made it so Suimei dono has freedom. In addition the funds were also prepared,it may seem rude, it was a bit too much to give such treatment to a man who ran away such a rumor was circulating inside the castle it seems, after we departed it seems to have become a small uproar.」

「Such a thing happened.....!」**

Titania's surprised voice was filled with astonishment. The king of Astel Almadius thought of Suimei to that extent. The king is a kind man. That I honestly think.

There Mizuki unexpectedly expressed her doubt.

「But why the nobles of Astel be against Suimei kun leaving? 」

To such a doubt of Mizuki, Reiji also suddenly recalled it.*

「That is , for the purpose of making us do what we are told to do if we ever were to disobey. 」

「What.....」

The surprised look of Mizuki was something which Reiji expected.

If it's such a ruthless man who can easily use and throw away their own

country's soldier and unrelated business caravan then, such a thing is not impossible to think. If we were to change our mind and cancel the subjugation of the demon king, it's a serious thing for a human of Astel. (TLN: This part was confusing.)

Here I'm also a human. There can even be a change of heart. The other side may feel uneasy about it.

May be can't prevent such a change of heart, however they can prevent the cancellation of demon king subjugation.

So.

「——Taking Suimei as a hostage, they wanted to make us against our will subjugate the demon lord, isn't that right? 」

「Probably.」

「——！！」

「.....And now, it became impossible to do it, since it became impossible for them to control Suimei by themselves, so they decided to make him a decoy. Since they don't know what Suimei will do, it's better to get rid of him as soon as possible. 」

Gregory nods again.

And Mizuki who saw him nod, had tears welling up in the outer corners of her eyes.

「Heartless. Such a thing is too heartless.....」(TLN: hidoi yo. hido sugiru yo sonna no)*

Undoubtedly that grieving voice and those tears are Mizuki's honest feelings. Even though she has the resolute strength to come to subjugate the demon lord, even so she is after all a single young girl.

..... Summoned for help, but such treatment towards those who are cooperating. Hearing such a thing, just like Mizuki, I feel like express those feelings which are welling up inside me through my mouth.

There Titania.

「.....The country's, say, what happened to the defense of Meteru and Kurand city」

「Ah.....」

「That's right..... ! 」

By Titania's question two of them suddenly remembered. Because their heads were full of Suimei, that they completely forgot about that matter. If the Mazoku are targeting Suimei's group than it's definite that the Mazoku have infiltrated the country's territory.

There wasn't the slightest possibility that they rampage after they attacked the business caravan. Then when thought carefully, isn't it inevitable for the city nearby to be in danger.

Titania as a princess of Astel it was a matter of distress for the country. It was something which one mustn't forget to hear.

「Yes. For every city's defense it seems people from the local mercenary groups and magicians guilds are recruited, from the adventurer's guild secretly through the back powerful people are called, regarding Meteru there is the defense corps as well as the corps for attacking the Mazoku army. Each and every nobles directly controlled armies, the royal order of knights were called as well as there are powerful selected people from the magic division, right now they are in the middle of organizing. 」

「If there are so much preparations so why use something like decoy.....?」

「The time for organizing the force was too little, there simply wasn't much time. Messengers were sent to each nobles of city of Kurand to mobilize their forces. For that reason Suimei dono and the business caravan were marked and they have to become the sacrifice.....」

Wasn't there any? To save many people sacrifice a small number of people. Although it makes sense, but isn't it too much to do to a person who didn't wish for it.

When I think about Suimei who doesn't know anything, the feeling it's giving is too much for my heart to bear.

That I think is true for both Mizuki and Titania.

I look down in vexation towards my feet, also feeling of disappointment/despair starts to mix in

There Gregory prostrated himself again.

「I'm extremely sorry.」(TLN: moshiwake gozai masen)

「.....」

What's the point of apologizing more than this. It can't overturn the fact that Suimei is falling into a crisis. Thus I didn't have any words to say. My anger is exhausted. Only the ill feeling of depression which can't be cleared remains.

——Still, in front of my eyes is the figure of the middle aged knight who is bowing his head so hard that his head is rubbing against the earth.

What type of expectations does he have against such an apology? Such an makeshift underhanded apology. The feeling of earnestness in the apology is clearly visible. In his heart he is probably laughing so hard that it's hard for him stand.

Either way, I feel sick into my stomach, all these speculations and brain racking is causing in me a feeling of self loathing.

(Ah——!)

Suddenly as if hit by a lightning Reiji was able to understand.

If it was so. Entrusting myself to my fury/passion without thinking anything, throwing my anger and words towards him, without even looking at his mental state or true motives. If I were to cool myself down

and think carefully, it was something that was easy to understand.

「Reiji kun?」

Mizuki is puzzled seeing my appearance who came to an understanding.

But right now isn't the time to explain it to her.

「Gregory san, that's enough. 」

「He,hero dono?」

I grab both shoulders of Gregory and draw the curtain to this long long apology.

Right, he didn't need to apologize. Rather here it is necessary to express our thanks no matter what.

Because——

「Gregory san. Actually when you heard this story, you should have told us everything clearly. But you only said that the Mazoku are approaching us, you ought to said skillfully guiding somewhere else」 (TLN: Probably he is referring to Gregory's previous dialogue I'm a bit confused here)

「Huh——?」

「—— ! ?」

Titania and Gregory both stared with wide eyes. There immediately Mizuki raised a question.

「Reiji kun, what do you mean?」

Part 04

「If Gregory san only did as told by the duke Hardias then, there was no need for him to tell us about Suimei. Because Gregory san only needed to let us run away, there was no need for him to expressly telling us all this and creating distrust towards himself. 」

「That.....」

Mizuki's such a hard to notice small voice was more prominent than any other sound in the area.

To provoke distrust. That's right. Thinking again, it was an odd confession. If Suimei's present condition was to be told to us , it was inevitable that it will incur our wrath. While knowing that, there is no reason for a superior to create distrust towards himself, if it was the subordinate of the person who adopted this plan, it was all the more reason to hide everything about Suimei.

Besides if he were to keep quiet about this without telling us about anything, then there would be no reason for him to lower his head to such children.

Still Gregory talked about Suimei, probably because to this person there are things that he won't yield to.**

And then, it was one thing to bow one's head but to make sense it was his whole body. (Dogeza probably)

「I'm sorry. I finally realized. I shouted at you, without any consideration towards you, I'm extremely sorry. 」

「Hero dono.....」

When Reiji with his honest feelings bowed his head, Gregory who couldn't withstand the feeling let out his voice.

To such him Titania came near.**

「Gregory—. I'm extremely sorry. Before listening to Reiji sama even I too thought of you with distrust. 」

When he heard those words Gregory lowered his head as if his head was hanging.

And then he, as if confessing, put together words falteringly.

「.....I wasn't able to do it. Without any connection to this world, summoned only to defeat the demon king, the people who kindly undertook such responsibility, I couldn't deceive them. And right now even though their friend is in danger, still pretending to ignore such a thing wouldn't that be the act of an ungrateful person? 」*

Gregory who without hiding anything, frankly expressed his opinion, at the last moment slowly bowed his head.

「I'm extremely sorry. For I have no power. 」

To this Reiji shook his head.

「It's ok. After all——」

That's right, if someone were to be at fault, it should be all my fault. It was only me who was suppose to be summoned, even after involving two of my friends, I didn't refuse as my friend said, so it became like this.

Therefore——

「.....Reiji sama?」

I who has started to walk, hear Titania's voice right behind me.

Hearing it I turn around, once more Titania, this time very impatiently call out.

「Whe, where do you intend to go Reiji sama!?!」

「.....Isn't it obvious? We are going to rescue Suimei right now.」

Those words were given half impulsively.

It was decided. It's already a settled matter that we will go to save him. When I told that without a slightest bit of hesitation, again Titania expressed her bewilderment.

「Such a, going now what can we do ! ?」

Following that was Gregory's voice.

「Hero dono! I can guess your feelings, but going now, we won't make it in time! There isn't any horse anymore!」

It's certainly as he said. The horse was killed in the earlier fight. Without any foot we won't make it in time. (TLN: How many horses were there again? I don't remember at all.)

But, it doesn't mean that there isn't even one left.

「If it's a horse then there is one. It's Rofuri's horse.」

「It, it's certainly as Reiji sama says, but going now what do you plan on doing ! Even if you manage to make it in time to meet Suimei, going there is the Mazoku army. As you are now you will only die in vain! 」

「But.....」

Titania's such admonition stopped any objections from this side. What she said was certainly correct, no objection was allowed. And it stopped, and then she started to press for an answer? **

「Reiji sama, please reconsider it. Reiji sama if something were to happen to you now, who on earth will defeat Nakshatra?」

「.....!」

That's right. It's just as Titania said, after coming here I accepted their request, but before that I am the hero.

Forgetting that, dying because I was driven by my personal feelings, in a sense it can be called as betrayal.

——But still, there are things I can't agree with.

「.....Reiji sama. About Suimei, it's painful for me too, but for now please——」

Therefore.

「No way!」

「Re, Reiji sama? 」

「I don't want to abandon Suimei! He is my friend! That's why! 」

I was gnashing my teeth and clasp my fist from frustration, but I couldn't give up.

I wanted to go and save him. To me, just like Mizuki he is also an irreplaceable friend. That's why I don't want to lose him. I may lose him, but not doing anything, I don't want that.

There, I run into Titania's worry.**

「There is no gurranty that you will be able to save Sumei from the Mazoku !?」

「Even I understand that! Even so, even so I」

「Reiji sama.....」

Running out of things to appeal with, panting Titania shakes her eyes in perplexity. I am worried, still I have the duty as the princess, even so the worries inside my heart is it selfish? (TLN: Sorry confused here a bit)
There is no confidence in defeating the demon lord, the proof of this are the words which were able to shake oneself.**

Reiji averted his eyes from such her and face Mizuki. She who was also from the same world should also be able to understand.

「.....Mizuki.」

「I, me.....」

「Mizuki! Let's go! We are going to go and help Suimei!」

Grabbing Mizuki's shoulders Reiji appealed to her . Going to save their friend. Obstinate. He believed that if it was her she would give her approval.

However——

「Ah, that.....」**

Without noticing it, Mizuki tremble slightly.

「I.....」

Mizuki shakes and quiver her eyes, which are pitch black like darkness.

That's right she, just a little while ago finished her first battle. It was her first fight and it was the first time she fought with the Mazoku. And at that moment she surely felt the terror of battle. Then is it a good thing to force such her to fight against the Mazoku army.

No, it isn't.

And I asked her who was trembling such a impossible thing, that was completely wrong.**

In an instances those self satisfying words rushed into my head. If all the feelings that I showed here are same, again I look around myself, everyone there has the perplexed expression.

「I'm sorry, Mizuki.」

「Re, Reiji kun?」

I turn my back on the call which came in reply to my apology. I understand it's to satisfy oneself. But, I don't want give up.

I have such mixture of feelings, Therefore.

「It's good enough for only me to go. Everyone wait in a safe place.
Rofuri! 」

I give a loud call to Rofuri from afar, who is just returning from patrolling. Rofuri who doesn't know any of the developments till now, puzzled came hurrying on his horse.

「Huh, e? What is it, Hero dono?」

「Lend me the horse?」

「Wha? I don't mind, but why on earth」

Rofuri who got down from the horse's back—. Two voices obstruct his words.

「Please wait, Reiji sama!」

「Wait Reiji kun!」

Running at him hurriedly from behind, at that time Reiji——

Chapter 26 (part-01 Unedited) - To The Forest

—— Forest.

To be more accurate it's forest. (TLN: Both word means the same, it probably means a more denser forest than normal)

In general it can be said that, it's a place where a large amount of trees are growing en masse.

When expressed in words it may sound simple however, in present day Japan, no even in the past Japan, a thing which simply meant (forest), is something to which Japanese people are not very familiar with. (TLN: Mori)

In Japan forest boasts about 70% of it's territory(TIn: Shinrin), because of it's mountainous topography to Japanese people the meaning of forest is equal to mountains where every kind of trees grow thickly, in many cases there are trees which thickly grows and create something like an umbrella resulting in dim lights in places, Japanese people tends to remember (a?) mountain.

Certainly that's also a forest but, it may be said that there are inconsistencies to the forest said to be in the west.

Europe, from olden days it was a land only of forest. Forest wasn't only on mountains, it was also on the plain grounds and hills, it was everywhere where people could live, it blocked off all types of connections/ relationships between people.

—The reason was because if one entered death will constantly be beside them. The forest was the living place of terrifying beasts such as stray dogs, wolves, bears and tigers also the same type of trees which crowded together disturbed a person's sense of direction. At that time, the thought of crossing the forest, to the people who lived at that time

was a very hard to imagine and a difficult thing to do.

The forest was also a place which gave people blessings, on the contrary there is no doubt that it became one of the factors which prevented the development of people.

So a forest is an unfamiliar thing to Japanese people. Thus these forest are something where people get lost, feels inexpressible terror, otherwise if to remind a dense forest/jungle, it can only be correctly thought of in ones imagination.*****

Suimei who left the business caravan and entered the forest to chase after Lefille, for quite a while was following the trace of her magic power, while walking.

—Determined to not meet up, and to not cause trouble for the business caravan, to get away from them Lefille was in quite a hurry. If it's her who without a complain in accordance to Galeo's wish left the caravan, it's not strange that she took such an action.

While walking and searching for Lefille, Suimei looked up towards the cloudy sky which hard to come by in this umbrella like forest and thinks.

(A savage land. After all like wild beasts, in a fantasy demons will appear like it is natural.....)

—I only halt for a little while to take a break. I lean on the tree which is in front of me, gulp down the water which was in the canteen, after drinking a mouthful I breath out exquisitely. Most likely the demons will appear without a doubt. To say the degree of dangers, the other world's forest is much more dangerous than the forest from the world from the other side.

To say nothing of the attacks from the beasts, it's a uncivilized place.

while walking there is not a single village for considerable amount of distance. There is no signs of people living, reclaiming lands, maintaining trees, the number of trees here keeps on increasing forever.

In a sense it's a wide area boundary fence which contains all sorts of danger, and prevents any sorts of domain erosion.

(I who on my own free will stepped foot in such a place, I'm such a.....)

Is it praiseworthy, am I not just a fool? Even if I ask myself in my head, the doubt just keeps getting bigger. Meanwhile, before drinking water again, I ask myself again.

「——I'm sorry while you are bracing yourself, but can you please forgive me by not cutting me? 」

I say to the nervous swordswomen who was preparing a sword slash from behind at that moment. Speaking of that sharpness, were planning to cut trees and everything along with it in half? It was done (before?).

In that silent forest those flat words of Suimei echoed out, after a little while the sound of treading grass could be heard, and he heard the perplexed voice of a familiar person.

「.....Suimei kun? Why are you here?」

「Well, it's just as you see. I came chasing after you. 」

When I turn around, there I see the figure Lefille, standing there with the tip of her long sword pointing downwards. Because the presence was thin, she probably thought the one chasing after her was a beast and she

was preparing to cut it down.

When I calmly state the truths, Lefille twists her face with a grim expression and asks.

「Came after? Foolish, if you stay with me it's dangerous you know? For what reason? 」

「That's because, it's difficult for a single person. I was worried. 」

When Suimei said this, Lefille like a prim person closed her eyes in a cold manner and puts on air.***

「There is no need to worry. Even if I'm alone I'll be able to manage somehow or another. Your actions are, unnecessary meddling. 」

「Then you can handle the dangers all by yourself? 」

「That's right.」

This, what do you know, tsundere. However, bluntly speaking it is something which will collapse before long.

While thinking such things, a sarcastic smile appeared on Suimei's face as he pointed out.

「Then I'll ask something bluntly, are those amounts of water and foods sufficient?」

「U....., that is, it's.....」

「Dont you agree?」

Lefille who is lost for words glance sideways embarrassed. When I demand an answer from such her, as if she suddenly thought of an objection, the expression where she puts on air revives again.

「Even you didn't bring that much stuff with you? A person who doesn't have much to feed oneself, doesn't have the qualification to say such——」

「Even with this?」

After Suimei said that, it completely destroyed that serious and triumphant look, Suimei started to bring out luggage from the bag which were bigger than the bag those were in.

「The qualification.....」

「What is it about qualification? Is bringing in the acceptable amount of food unacceptable?」

In front of Suimei who said that with a boastful attitude, Lefille was blinking her eyes in surprise with a dumbfounded expression. This way there was nothing which can be said to be unacceptable.

It's the student bag of Suimei, it's a bag, which capacity can be increased into a gigantic storage using magic. Even if you say huge, it

matches with kabbala and alchemy, let's say it just replaces the capacity of the school bag with a foreign made suitcase's capacity of 140 liter.

However it's a convenient and easy to use item which Suimei was proud of.

When such an mysterious thing happened in front of her eyes, Lefille while showing a surprised expression, asked with suspicion.

「.....What is that strange magic tool?」

「You are saying it's strange, it's a awful way of saying.Well whatever, this way you can't say it's unnecessary meddling right? 」